MAN ON BRIDGE! EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT FROM NEW **SONNY ROLLINS** BIO

AMERICA'S JAZZ MAGAZINE

JazzTimes

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022

ANTONIO SÁNCHEZ

Inside the Bad Hombre's Genre-Bending New Album

By Ted Panken

2022-23 Jazz Education Guide ★★★

DENARDO COLEMAN
Still in His Prime Time

BILL BRUFORD
A Prog-Jazz Retrospective

DR. GEORGE BUTLER
He Helped Young Lions Roar

DRUM SPECIAL
Louis Hayes
Paul Motian
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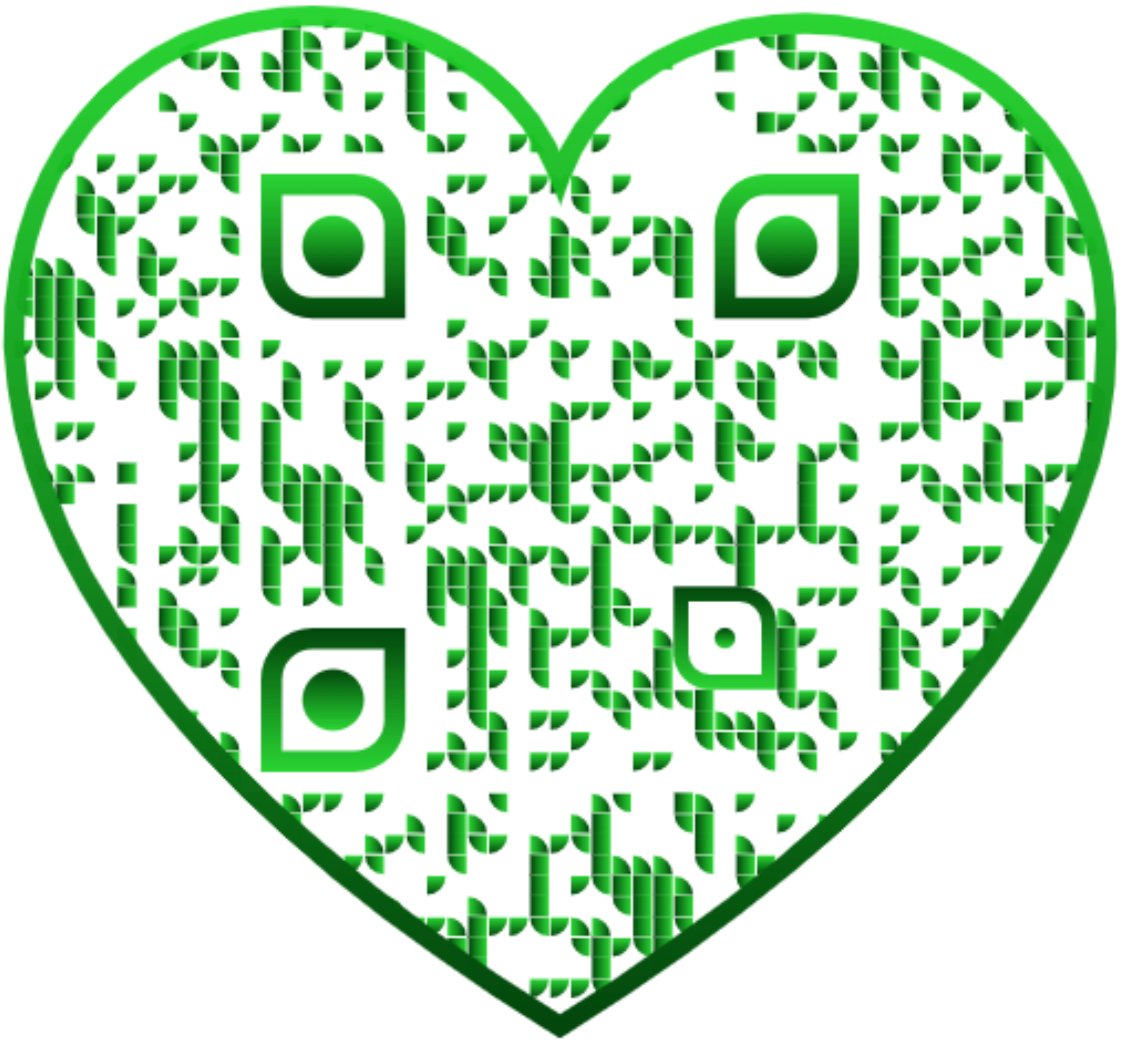

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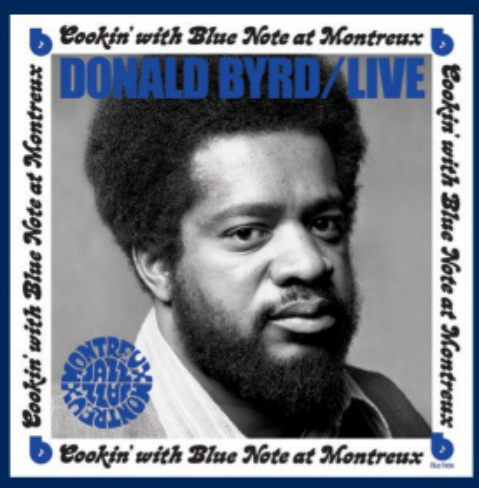

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A gifted producer and A&R man, George Butler coaxed Miles Davis back into the spotlight, played a key role in the ascent of Wynton Marsalis, and spurred on the young lions of the 1980s and '90s. Then he disappeared from the business. What happened? **John Murph** finds out.

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Cover image by Fernando Aceves
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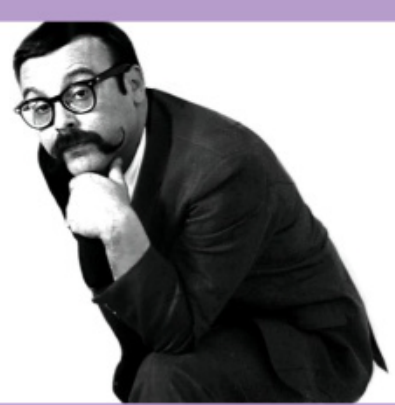
➔ Exclusive Content

Trumpeter/composer Etienne Charles reopened New York's David Geffen Hall in October with the premiere of an original piece called *San Juan Hill*, which pays tribute to the neighborhood that Lincoln Center (of which Geffen Hall is a part) replaced. Check out Morgan Enos' live review. Plus album and festival reviews, obituaries, our regular *JazzTimes* 10 lists, and more.

➔ *JT* News

On October 16, which would have been Roy Hargrove's 53rd birthday, a special screening of *Hargrove*, Eliane Henri's new documentary about the late trumpeter, took place at the high school he'd attended: Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas. Among the noteworthy attendees were the film's executive producer and Hargrove's classmate at Booker T. Washington, singer Erykah Badu. Natalie Weiner was there to cover the event for *JazzTimes*, and you can read her insightful report on our website.



➔ Audio & Video

We recently premiered a previously unreleased take of Vince Guaraldi's "Manhã de Carnaval," drawn from a new 60th-anniversary expanded edition of his breakthrough album, 1962's *Jazz Impressions of Black Orpheus*. Also check out streams and downloads from Vicki Burns, the Dave Slonaker Big Band, the Kim Nalley Band with Houston Person and Maria Muldaur, and more.

JazzTimes
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Editor
Mac Randall
mrandall@jazztimes.com

Reviews Editor
Michael J. West

Contributing Writers
David R. Adler, Dan Bilawsky, Shaun Brady, Philip Booth, Brent Butterworth, Nate Chinen, Sharonne Cohen, Thomas Conrad, J.D. Considine, Morgan Enos, Brad Farberman, Colin Fleming, David Fricke, James Gavin, Andrew Gilbert, Fernando Gonzalez, Steve Greenlee, Evan Haga, Geoffrey Himes, Marc Hopkins, Willard Jenkins, Mike Joyce, Ashley Kahn, David Kastin, Aidan Levy, Bill Meredith, Lee Mergner, Ken Micallef, Allen Morrison, John Murph, Jennifer Odell, Ted Panken, Adam Perlmutter, Britt Robson, Mike Shanley, Jackson Sinnenberg,Jeff Tamarkin, Lucy Tauss, George Varga, Natalie Weiner, David Whiteis

Contributing Photographers & Illustrators
John Abbott, Enid Farber, Ken Franckling, Peter Gannushkin, Ben Johnson, Jimmy Katz, Marek Lazarski, R. Andrew Lepley, Jati Lindsay, Alan Nahigian, John Rogers, Nick Ruechel, Jack Vartoogian, Michael Weintrob, Michael Wilderman

ART & PRODUCTION

Senior Designer
Scott Brandsgaard

Graphic Designer
Nicole Popma

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Director of Media Solutions
Ed Feldman

Media Solutions Manager
Toni Eunice

Client Services
clientservices@madavor.com

Marketing Associate
Jaime Sweeney

SEO & Content Marketing Supervisor
Anthony Buzzeo

OPERATIONS

Operations Coordinator
Laura Randall

Client Services Manager & Media Analyst
Tou Zong Her

Senior Client Services & Operations Lead
Andrea Palli

Client Services Associate
Darren Cormier

Accounting Director
Amanda Joyce

Accounts Payable Associate
Tina McDermott

Accounts Receivable Associate
Wayne Tuggle

DIGITAL OPERATIONS

Audience Development Analyst
Ryan Gillis

Senior Digital Designer
Mike Decker

WordPress Developer
David Glassman

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Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
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Contact us:
JazzTimes, Madavor Media
35 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 101, Braintree, MA 02184

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Butler Did It

Any issue of *JazzTimes* that contains both our annual drum special and our annual Jazz Education Guide, as this one does, is bound to be packed with interesting stuff. But I'd like to draw your attention away from the dominant themes of this issue for a moment, as they should be fairly clear to you just from looking at the cover and table of contents. Instead, I want to direct you to my favorite article of this month's crop, which has nothing to do with drumsticks or pedagogy (at least not directly): John Murph's deeply researched feature on the life and achievements of Dr. George Butler.

Butler's name, like that of many important historical figures behind the jazz scenes, has faded over time. But during his years at the helm of Blue Note Records in the 1970s, and especially as an A&R executive for nearly two decades at Columbia Records, he made a deep mark on the music we love. His influence on the careers of numerous leading stars, from Miles Davis to the Marsalis brothers to Harry Connick Jr. to the late Joey DeFrancesco, was significant and undeniable. Whether you love or hate the "young lions" movement of the '80s, you've got to admit that it was a major force, and after reading this article, you'll know that it wouldn't have been what it was without George Butler's input.

Murph really did his homework here, contacting far-flung friends, family, colleagues, and of course many of the musicians with whom Butler worked, including Connick, Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, and Jane Ira Bloom. He also clears up at least some of the mystery that surrounds Butler's sudden disappearance from the music business in the mid-'90s. And he tells the story of Butler's final years; I'll caution you that it's not a happy one.

Yet even though the piece ends tragically, it provides a positive service to everyone who reads it. Good deeds of the past are brought back out into the light, even as the man who performed them is acknowledged as something less than perfect (like all of us). An individual who made a real difference—and not that long ago either—is recognized and appreciated once again. That's the power of a great magazine article: It can change the way you look at history. It also can make a difference. And I'm proud to have been a part of bringing this particular article into the pages of *JazzTimes*.

—MAC RANDALL

Sour Notes: We have two corrections to report for our October issue reviews section. The label for Planet Drum's *In the Groove* is 360 Productions, not Valley Entertainment, and while Shaun Brady's assessment of Kendrick Scott's *Corridors* hasn't changed, the album's release date did; it is now scheduled for a March 3 release. Also, in some digital versions of our October Farewells page, the late Florida trumpeter Dan Miller was referred to as Tim Miller. We regret the errors.

Chief Adjuah (formerly Christian Scott)

Ron Carter

The Pittsburgh Jazz Festival Goes Big

A post-pandemic move from the street to the stadium is paying dividends

For years, the Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival (PIJF) took place on the street. Over one weekend in June, Downtown thoroughfares Penn Avenue or Liberty Avenue were closed off to traffic to make room for three stages. While the festival, which began in 2011, also featured some indoor ticketed concerts, the outdoor events were free to anyone lured in by the music.

Then 2020 came and Downtown was quiet.

Last summer, the festival came back with a twist: The two-day event moved across the Monongahela River to Highmark Stadium, with multiple stages set up on the artificial turf field that serves as home to the Pittsburgh Riverhounds soccer team. Admission was no longer free, but a one- or two-day pass granted access to seven acts each day. The sound was fine for anyone sitting in the stadium seats, but most attendees opted to get closer, setting up their own chairs on the field, shifting between stages with each act. Clearly, if you book it, they will come.

On September 16, the 12th edition of the PIJF kicked off at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC) with a sold-out concert by Ron Carter Foursight. The esteemed bassist, still looking youthful at 85, clearly hasn't grown tired of the iconic bassline he created for "Seven Steps to Heaven" with Miles Davis in 1963. It sounded as fresh as ever, coming amid a set that flowed from one tune to the next. When Carter hit a double-stop that slid up the neck, the weight and clarity of his tone were breathtaking. Pianist Renee Rosnes sounded especially fiery throughout the evening, angular and aggressive one moment, digging deep into "My Funny Valentine" the next. The festivities continued at the Wilson Center all night with *A Taste of Jazz*, which included jam sessions led by pianist Orrin Evans and multi-instrumentalist/vocalist Frank Lacy.

This might be personal preference, but the opportunity to be among a crowd seeing live performances in an open-air venue on Saturday afternoon (Sept. 17) felt pretty thrilling. Maybe it was something to do with sitting on a 360-foot-wide field with

TARA GEYER

Melissa Aldana and Pablo Menares

STEPHANIE STRASBURG

a great view of the city behind the stage. Or the feeling of community generated by sharing space with fellow jazz fans. But the excitement level was high from the moment Melissa Aldana led off the day's program at Highmark.

The tenor saxophonist's set, drawn from her recent *12 Stars* album, presented the ideal opening act, balancing a pensive delivery with the palpable urge to stretch out within the music. At times, Aldana recalled Charles Lloyd, using a tone that felt gentle as she explored melodic territory with aggression.

Guitarist Dan Wilson hails from Akron, Ohio but, as Scott Hanley of jazz radio station WZUM pointed out, that city is "just a traffic jam away from Pittsburgh." His set bypassed original tunes in favor of energized works by McCoy Tyner, Freddie Hubbard, and John Scofield. The latter's "Let the Cat Out" inspired his quartet to extend beyond the blues structure, with Wilson getting into some wild rhythmic angles that propelled him further.

By mid-afternoon, the sun was beating down on the field, but as soon as pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba's rhythm section launched its first song, a couple dozen dancers flocked to the plastic tile floor set up in front of the stage. Vocalist Aymée Nuviola encouraged them, many of whom swayed and stepped for the entire hourlong set.

It seems no jazz festival is complete without throwing together some "all-star" group of musicians, but PIJF had the right idea. "DByrd@90: Tribute to Donald Byrd and the Blackbyrds" added to the party atmosphere of the day with a band that included another almost-hometown hero, trumpeter Sean Jones. (He hails from Youngstown, Ohio but lived and taught in town for several years.) The group also included Lacy (trombone, vocals), Gary Bartz (alto saxophone), Brett Williams (piano), Endea Owens (bass), Anita Levels (vocals), young flutist Nathan Paul Davis and, fresh from a set with his Kinfolk group, Nate Smith (drums). Songs like "You and Music" and "Change (Makes You Want to Hustle)," with their singalong choruses, might skew away from jazz, but Bartz in particular delivered a solo during the former tune that went beyond mere party blowing.

Saturday's bill also featured the Vanisha Gould Quartet and Stanley Clarke N 4ever. Vocalist Gould performed with the unique instrumentation of piano, viola and upright bass, which played up the drama in songs like "Fall in Love with Me in the Fall." Clarke, the legendary fusion bassist, closed out the night with a band of 20-somethings who have clearly digested their leader's visceral style, even if that means they sometimes veered toward excess during solos.

It bodes well when your opening band has a Hammond B-3 organ, Fender Rhodes, and clavinet onstage. DJ Harrison of Butcher Brown played all three as the Virginia-based quintet led off Sunday's program. Their blend of electric jazz, funk backbeats, and hip-hop would almost have been better suited to a late-day set, when the park would be filled up. Nevertheless, Butcher Brown, who also performed here back in 2019, played with a tight urgency that maintained the edge of all their styles.

Vocalist Samara Joy opened her set with "This Is the Moment," and the choice couldn't have been more appropriate. Only 22, she commanded the stage like someone with experience beyond her years. Part of her appeal comes from her midrange voice, which touches on Betty Carter huskiness, along with a Sarah Vaughan influence. When someone this young writes such perceptive lyrics for Fats Navarro's "Nostalgia," seeming to get into the great bop trumpeter's head by converting his original solo into syllables, it's clear she's going places.

Chief Adjuah (the artist initially known as Christian Scott) spoke during his set about how his bandmates have studied music from different cultures and incorporate that into their performance. This musical research could be felt in what was one of the festival's most dramatic sets. Though primarily a trumpeter, Adjuah began by playing his custom-made Adjuah Bow, a stringed instrument similar to the African n'goni or kora, creating a pedal-point drone. As he sang, his group built a deep groove, steered largely by djembe master Weedie Braimah and trap drummer Ele Howell. When he moved to trumpet, the bent bell on Adjuah's horn enabled him to create a swirling effect that added range to his already penetrating tone.

Fun as they were, the Average White Band felt a bit lite after Adjuah's set. Ledisi followed, by which time the audience had swelled to the biggest size of the weekend, with folding chairs as far as the eye could see. Despite the relatively recent release of *Ledisi Sings Nina*, her set included only one song associated with Nina Simone, a funked-up version of "See-Line Woman." She took a few breaks to show off her scatting skills, but most of the set was geared toward R&B. Not that the audience minded. Ledisi's recurring message of "Love yourself by any means necessary" drew loud responses from the field.

Incognito, on the other hand, harked back to the time when jazz and R&B flowed together in a more organic way. The British-based group debuted in 1981 with the album *Jazz Funk*, and its sound still fits that description all these decades later. Three horns, electric piano, and four vocalists—including Maysa Leak, who's been working with the band since 1992—brought the festival to a rousing finish, energizing even those who might have been oversaturated by so much music.

—MIKE SHANLEY

Jakob Bro (L) and Joe Lovano

With Motian as Muse

JAKOB BRO and JOE LOVANO join forces to honor pole star PAUL MOTIAN

On November 22, 2021, some of the late Paul Motian's close friends converged on the Village Recording studio in Copenhagen. Guitarist Jakob Bro and tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, miraculously aligning numerous calendars, had convened this collection of singular musicians to record an album saluting the influential drummer/composer. Completely by happenstance, that date marked the tenth anniversary of Motian's passing—a touch of synchronicity that seemed to place the gathering on a higher spiritual level.

The result of that timely congregation—*Once Around the Room – A Tribute to Paul Motian* (ECM)—is the first recorded collaboration between Bro, a former member of the drummer's Electric Bebop Band, and Lovano, who spent three decades working with the honoree in an inimitable trio with guitarist Bill Frisell. For both men, and the project as a whole, Motian's connective capabilities and philosophy offered great guidance. "Paul has truly been present for me since I played with him," Bro says. "So I had been thinking about making something that was related to his legacy. And Joe is one of my big heroes. I've been listening to him since I was a kid."

Having previously worked with Lovano—now his labelmate on ECM, the imprint of many notable recordings by Motian as both leader and sideman—the guitarist reached out and floated the idea. From there it developed organically. "The creation of this album happened in a very natural way, from our [affiliations] with Paul and hearing each other through the years and being inspired by the idea of creating music within the music together, which is what Paul was all about," Lovano says.

> ***"Creating music within the music together is what Paul was all about."***
>
> **–Joe Lovano**

In forming a septet boasting Larry Grenadier and Thomas Morgan on double bass, Anders Christensen playing bass guitar, and Joey Baron and Jorge Rossy on drums, Bro and Lovano nod to Motian's penchant for building unconventional ensembles. But more importantly, they also acknowledge his enduring associations. "All of the participants had a connection to Paul," Lovano explains. "Even Jorge and Joey, who never played with him but were in his audience. And he was in their audience too. Paul was hip to everybody on the scene. And throughout his lifetime, I think that's what inspired him most: It was all the relationships that he had with everybody."

Drawing on those bonds, the co-leaders and their bandmates deliver a program influenced by Motian's mutable compositions and fluid mindset. Lovano contributes "As It Should Be," a brooding journey along the borders of serialism, and the lengthy "For the Love of Paul," opening on a vertiginous melody and evolving through sublime interplay. Bro brings out the tender side of the septet with his touching ballad "Song to an Old Friend" and the lulling "Pause." Collective improvisation comes into the picture for the spellbinding "Sound Creation." And the ensemble dials directly into Motian's writing by interpreting his "Drum Music." "That was kind of Paul's theme and our theme for the trio," Lovano notes. "And he used it throughout his lifetime [with other bands too]."

With the release of *Once Around the Room*, Bro and Lovano forward and formalize their partnership while partaking in the joys of giving and receiving in the name of their mutual friend. And when this project goes live at the Village Vanguard in May of 2023, they'll have greater opportunities to create new dimensions in shared spaces. "I'm really excited to explore this music on a daily basis throughout that week," Bro admits. "I believe, with this instrumentation, that we can really move in so many directions."

—DAN BILAWSKY

ON STAGE

12 JANUARY

Winter Jazzfest (New York, NY): After a last-minute pivot away from live performances in 2022 due to the Omicron surge, this pillar of the jazz festival calendar returns at full strength (we hope) in 2023. The lineup is still TBA but, based on past seasons, it will undoubtedly be impressive.

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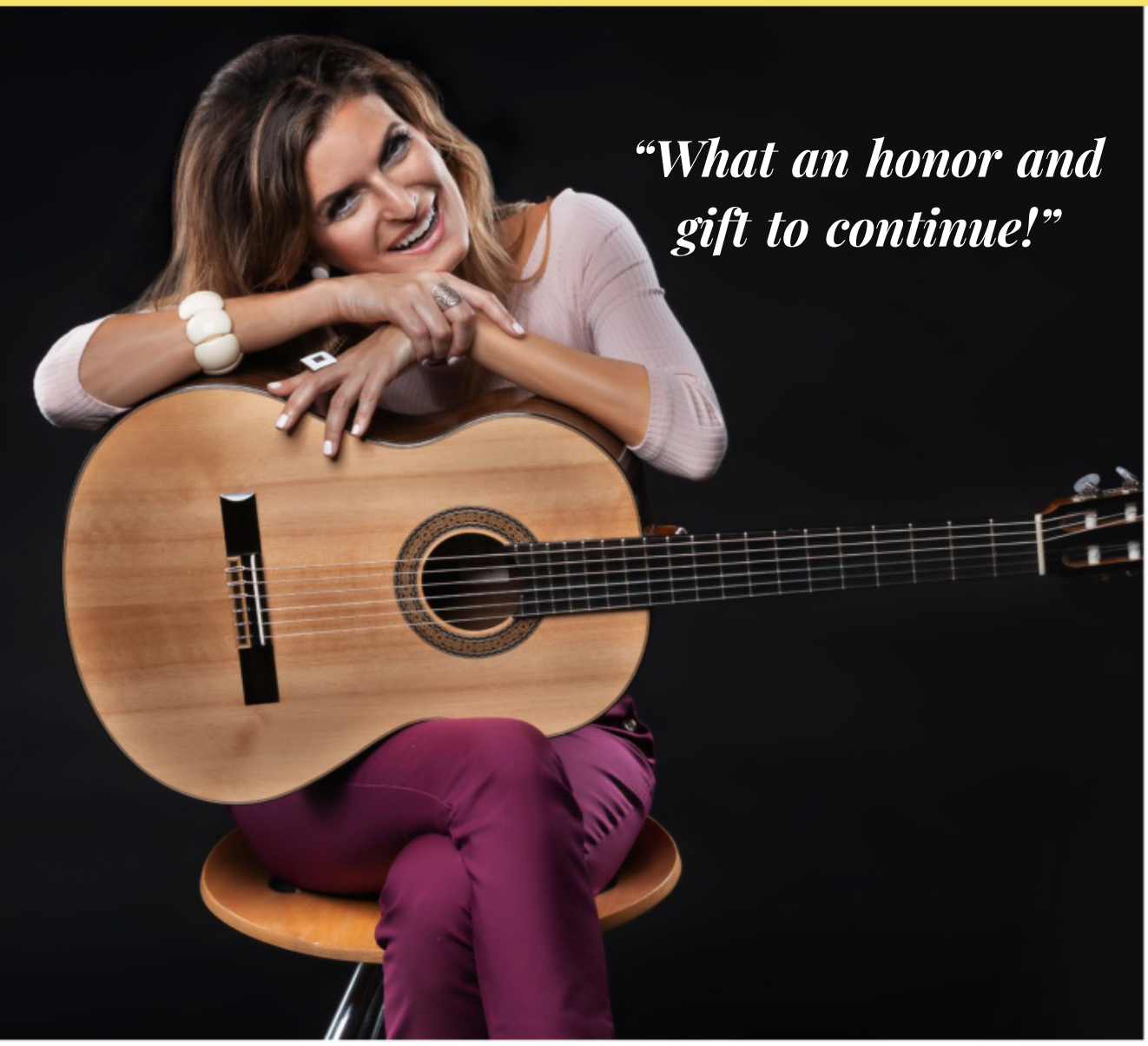


Bossa Nova: The Next Generation

Descended from a vaunted Brazilian family, DANIELA SOLEDADE introduces herself

North American jazz fans are just starting to learn the name Daniela Soledade, but in Brazil, where she was born and raised through her early teens, the family moniker echoes across some eight decades of musical creation. On her second album, *Pretty World* (Blue Line), the sleek, bossa nova-inspired vocalist gracefully walks a high wire, balancing her need to define herself as an artist and her desire to celebrate a brilliant and enduring legacy.

Before moving to Florida at the age of 14 with her mother, Soledade spent a good deal of her free time in rehearsals and recording studios with her father, guitarist Paulinho Soledade, a songwriter, producer and Baden Powell protégé. He absorbed the innovative bossa nova sound as a child running around Rio's Zum-Zum Club, a proving group for emerging stars opened and run by *his* father, songwriter and Antonio Carlos Jobim confederate Paulino Soledade. Paulino's wife, Lina de Luca, introduced Jobim to Vinícius de Moraes, and went on to create the choreography for their first epochal collaboration *Orfeu da Conceição*, the 1956 stage production that eventually became Marcel Camus' Academy Award-winning, bossa nova-igniting film *Black Orpheus*.

Recorded mostly in Rio with Daniela's father on bass and his longtime musical compatriot Claudio Infante on drums, *Pretty World* taps into that rich history, vividly illustrating that the Soledade family has thrived not in solitude but in a spectacularly creative community. For Daniela, the thrill wasn't just working with her father "and his friend from their teenage years," she said. "It was digging deeper in my grandfather's work, realizing he left a huge contribution to Brazilian music. What an honor and gift to continue! And then friends of his, these icons, have gotten into contact and become mentors to me."

Where her 2019 debut album *A Moment of You* introduced Soledade as a singer fluent in the pulse of bossa nova, her second release casts a wider net, starting with the title-track opener by Brazilian jazz pianist Antonio Adolfo (originally "Sa Marina" but rechristened with English lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman). Like Soledade, he's a longtime Florida resident, but they recorded together in Rio, offering a fresh take on his international hit. Connecting the day before he returned to the U.S., Adolfo was determined to make the session, telling her, "I've been a fan and friend of your family for 40 years."

She ended up writing a song with another familyfriend, 84-year-old bossa nova icon Roberto Menescal, supplying the Portuguese lyric to his tune "Como É Gostoso Sonhar," though she had to clear up some understandable confusion. "At first he thought my grandfather was my dad," she said. "He was telling me stories about playing in the Zum-Zum Club every night for four years. When he agreed to make a video for the song with me it was so wonderful because he lives on a little island and to get there you have to take a little boat, which of course is [the title of] his best-known recording, 'O Barquinho.'"

Expanding the album's family dynamic, she works closely with guitarist/arranger Nate Najar, her husband, producer, and songwriting collaborator. Randy Brecker, who has deep family ties to Brazil himself, contributes some glowing flugelhorn work on the couple's original "Beijo No Arpoador," while Harry Allen echoes an earlier tenor saxophonist with a flair for bossa nova on their arching love song "Nothing Compares." The album closes with her a cappella rendition of the Jobim/De Moraes standard "Eu Sei Que Vou Te Amar." It might seem like she's overly exposed, but anyone who's been to a performance populated by Brazilians will recognize the track as an invitation to sing along. Continuing the Soledade family tradition, she's finding her own way with some consummate company.

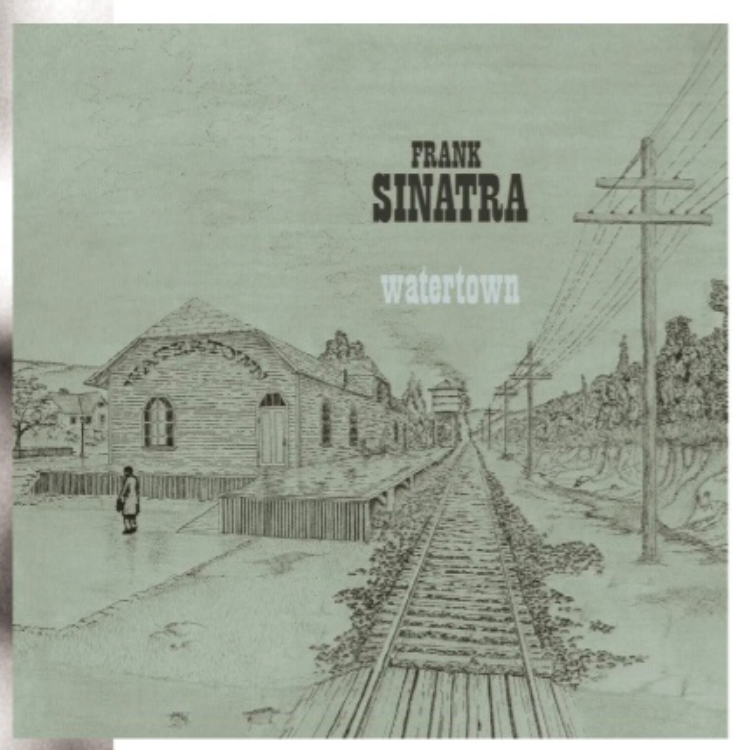
—ANDREW GILBERT

ON THE ROAD

29
NOVEMBER

Hiromi at Sony Hall (New York, NY): The pianist and composer will put on four shows here—two tonight and two on Nov. 30—with a string quintet, covering material from her *Silver Lining Suite* album, before closing the year out with a return to her native Japan for a string of concerts in December.

805 STUDIOS



Memories of a Sinatra Watershed

Songwriter/producer BOB GAUDIO looks back at 1970's *Watertown*

The Frank Sinatra of 1969 was a different man from the bobby-sox days of "The Voice," the 1950s Capitol Records peak, and even the Rat Packer of a mere six years prior. Coming off 1968's big-band session with Duke Ellington (*Francis A. & Edward K.*), the oddly folk music-filled *Cycles* (1968), the odder-still contempo pop of *My Way*, and the strangely poetic *A Man Alone: The Words and Music of McKuen*, he was uncertain where to go next stylistically.

In the mind of songwriter, producer, and Four Seasons member Bob Gaudio, Sinatra's next stop should be *Watertown*, an elegiac love story/concept album/set of soliloquies about a man facing the loss of a wife—on her terms, not his. Radical in its rethinking of the male ego's frailties (though Sinatra was considered something of a playboy, he had lived through deep heartache with the dissolution of three marriages by 1969), *Watertown* was produced and written by Gaudio with lyricist Jake Holmes and became the only album that Sinatra voiced over pre-recorded orchestral tracks. And though it sank like a stone when it was released in 1970, it has since become a cult classic. A 2022 vinyl re-release was remastered from the original Reprise session tapes, and the CD version includes alternate takes and Sinatra's Billie Holiday tribute "Lady Day."

Happy to never have a specific songwriting signature ("One of the most fun things for me is feeling confident in almost any style of music that I'd been asked to produce or write"), Gaudio states that the difference between *Watertown* and, say, "Sherry" or "Short Shorts" is their presentation of his diversity. "I get antsy having to follow up something I just made," he says. A great example of that, circa 1969, was transitioning his Four Seasons—famously fronted by Frankie Valli—from doo-wop-based pop into the sociopolitical psychedelia of *The Genuine Imitation Life Gazette* album with lyrics by Gaudio's then-new friend, Jake Holmes.

"Though our album wasn't successful, Frankie loved stretching out and had a broad range of tastes—jazz and Little Jimmy Scott, for example—and mentioned *Genuine Imitation Life* to *his* friend Frank," Gaudio says (that would be Sinatra). "Frankie suggested to Sinatra that he should let me write songs for him. So I did. And coming off of that collaboration with

FRANK SINATRA ENTERPRISES

Jake, I wanted to do something that Frank had never done."

To Gaudio, that meant something conceptual, a rock opera without the rock, that the songwriters never expected Sinatra to buy as an entire work. "Until he actually did," says a still-surprised Gaudio. "We assumed that Frank might take two, maybe three songs. But he did it as it was, in the same form with basically the same arrangements. 'Don't change a thing,' he said to me. When I asked him the exploding-bomb question about cutting the tracks with him present, as inspiration, but giving me the time to fix things, he asked, 'Not live?' And he said, 'Yeah, okay, let's do it.' Frank was obviously open to doing something different, so we had to do something even *more* different, really key into his vulnerability."

> ***"Maybe another artist could have sung this album, but I wouldn't know where to find them."***

Gaudio didn't usually tailor songs for specific artists, but Sinatra was an exception: "I was cognizant of his range, the keys and so forth, and I wasn't far from the mark when we began recording. And each of us was looking for a breath of fresh air as to how we usually worked.

"He was Frank, yet on *Watertown*, he wasn't FRANK," Gaudio stresses. "Sinatra was always into lyrics. He could read a song without singing its melody and bring you to tears. On *Watertown*, he did just that, but on lyrics that weren't his usual. Jake and I were thrilled. The vulnerability of a Vietnam War hero who had come back to his hometown, left by his wife, and left alone with his children—at that time, this was pretty unusual fare. Maybe another artist could have sung this album, but I wouldn't know where to find them. Sinatra just broke your heart."

—A.D. AMOROSI

NEW GROOVES

18 NOVEMBER

Dezron Douglas
Atalaya
International Anthem

The up-and-coming bassist (Pharoah Sanders, Ravi Coltrane, Louis Hayes) presents 10 new original tracks with support from keyboardist George Burton, saxophonist Emilio Modeste, and drummer Joe Dyson Jr.

25 NOVEMBER

Sean Gibbs
Confluence
Ubuntu

For Gibbs' second album on Ubuntu, the British trumpeter/composer leads a 17-piece big band through a program of six original compositions recorded at London's fabled AIR Studios.

9 DECEMBER

Satoko Fujii
Hyaku: One Hundred Dreams
Libra

This is the prolific Japanese pianist's 100th album, and she recorded it live at New York's DiMenna Center with some impressive guests, including trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, and electronics specialist Ikue Mori.

"A unique and brilliant sound by one of the best jazz pianists and composers around."
— KVNF Radio

LISA K. HILTON
PIANO

IGMAR THOMAS
TRUMPET

LUQUES CURTIS
BASS

OBED CALVAIRE
DRUMS

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WATCH: YouTube.com/LisaHiltonMusic • **CONNECT:** on all socials with **LisaHiltonMusic.com**

Farewells

Pharoah Sanders

Farrell "Pharoah" Sanders, a pioneering tenor saxophonist and composer who became synonymous with the spiritual jazz aesthetic, died Sept. 24 at a hospital in Los Angeles, California. He was 81. A pillar of jazz's avant-garde, Sanders broke through as a frontline partner with John Coltrane, joining the latter's band in 1965 and remaining with him until Coltrane's death in 1967. He then collaborated with Coltrane's widow Alice, and with Sun Ra, Don Cherry, and the Jazz Composer's Orchestra, before establishing himself as a leader with his epic 1969 recording "The Creator Has a Master Plan." He came to be widely regarded as Coltrane's heir. But Sanders also charted his own path. He cultivated one of the most distinctive tenor saxophone sounds in jazz: both rich and coarse, loaded with overblowing and split tones, prone to violent, shrieking outbursts. When the free and spiritual jazz he had learned from Coltrane lost favor with jazz audiences, though, Sanders experimented with funk and R&B, modal jazz, and straight-ahead bebop and hard bop. In the process he reinvented his improvisational approach, becoming mellower and more thoughtful. Although he never ceased performing, Sanders faded in and out of focus within the jazz world. He had regained prominence in 2021, however, with the release of *Promises*: a collaboration with electronic artist Floating Points and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Donald Smith, a a pianist and singer who rarely recorded as a leader but made memorable music alongside artists ranging from Art Blakey to Lester Bowie, died April 9 at a nursing home in Riverdale, N.Y. He was 78.

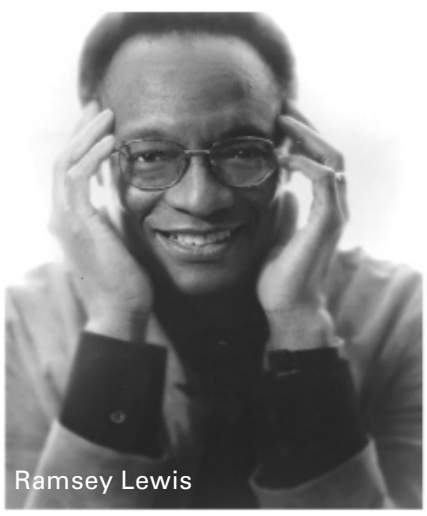
Eric Alan Wannenburg, a radio professional who worked to promote jazz at a succession of stations in his native South Africa over five decades, died June 22 after a long illness. He was 70.

Mike Lang, a well-traveled Hollywood pianist who played regularly with artists like Ella Fitzgerald and Peggy Lee in addition to his work on an estimated 2,000 film and TV scores, died Aug. 5 of lung cancer at his Studio City, Calif., home. He was 80.

Richard "Butch" Thompson, a pianist and clarinetist who specialized in ragtime and stride and is probably best known to radio listeners for his 12 years (1974-86) as musical director of Garrison Keillor's program *A Prairie Home Companion*, died Aug. 14 of Alzheimer's disease. He was 78.

Rolf Kühn, a German clarinetist and saxophonist who collaborated frequently with his brother, pianist Joachim Kühn, as well as an eclectic array of other artists including Oscar Pettiford, Urbie Green, Eartha Kitt, Buddy DeFranco, and Albert Mangelsdorff, died Aug. 18 in Berlin. He was 92.

Ramsey Lewis, a Chicago-born and -based pianist whose successful early career in jazz led him to surprising pop stardom, died in his sleep Sept. 12 at his Chicago home. He was 87. Lewis initially established himself in music with a softer-toned "cool" sound reminiscent of the Modern Jazz Quartet or Chico Hamilton. That changed when "The In Crowd," the Lewis trio's instrumental cover of a pop-soul hit, was issued in summer 1965. The record surpassed its source material, reaching No. 5 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and making the pianist a bona fide star, scoring three more hits over the next year. He achieved crossover success again with 1974's *Sun Goddess*, a jazz fusion album featuring members of Earth, Wind & Fire that peaked at No. 12 on the album chart. Lewis continued to record, write, and perform for the rest of his life, becoming an accomplished composer in later years. In addition, he was a longtime radio broadcaster, the host of the syndicated weekly show *Legends of Jazz* (which became a limited-run public television series in 2006) and *The Ramsey Lewis Morning Show*, which ran nationwide on the Smooth Jazz Network. He was noted for his activities in jazz advocacy, as artistic director of Jazz at Ravinia, where he helped organize the Chicago music festival's Jazz Mentor program, and founder of the Ramsey Lewis Foundation, which brought music education to underprivileged youth. However, he never stopped playing "The In Crowd" to appreciative audiences around the world.


Ramsey Lewis

Fredy Studer, a Swiss percussionist who made his mark both as a player—with Jack DeJohnette, Paul Motian, Charlie Mariano, and his own '70s fusion quartet OM—and as an equipment technician (he worked for the Paiste cymbal company as a "sound developer" for more than 40 years), died Aug. 22 after a serious illness. He was 74.

Creed Taylor, a groundbreaking jazz record producer and executive who founded two of the genre's most influential record labels, died Aug. 23 of heart failure related to a stroke in Winkelhaid, Germany. He was 93. In 1960, Taylor created Impulse! Records—which, with John Coltrane as its flagship artist, became the primary exponent of jazz's 1960s "New Thing" and a champion of progressive musicians. He also founded CTI Records in 1967, which became

SANDERS: DETROIT FESTIVAL FOUNDATION

Creed Taylor

equally iconic as an outlet for jazz fusion in the 1970s (and paved the way for the development of smooth jazz). Between those two ventures, Taylor served as a staff producer for Verve Records, where he was the conduit for introducing bossa nova to the United States by working with guitarist Charlie Byrd, saxophonist Stan Getz, and songwriter Antônio Carlos Jobim. He also worked at Bethlehem, ABC Paramount, and A&M Records. Journalist Marc Myers called Taylor "[o]ne of the unsung heroes of jazz history."

Capriel Dedeian, a Romanian guitarist and composer, died in Romania Aug. 22. He was 61.

Joey DeFrancesco, an astonishingly gifted multi-instrumentalist who as a teenager kickstarted a renaissance of the Hammond B-3

Joey DeFrancesco

organ in jazz, died Aug. 25 after a heart attack. He was 51. A virtuoso on the organ, DeFrancesco was a child prodigy, the son of another noted organist, Philadelphian "Papa" John DeFrancesco. The younger DeFrancesco began sitting in on his father's gigs when he was five years old, started gigging in his own right at 10, signed his first record contract at 16, and toured with Miles Davis at 17. As a player, he was renowned for his deep sense of groove and technique. Long after his arrival had reignited interest in the organ for the 1980s "Young Lions" generation, DeFrancesco remained the preeminent organist in jazz, a five-time Grammy nominee who won the *DownBeat* Readers Poll every year from 2005 to his death, and won the magazine's critics' poll nine times. When the Hammond Hall of Fame was founded in 2013, he was in its inaugural class of inductees. He was also the host of *Organized*, a weekly program of jazz organ, on SiriusXM's Real Jazz channel. In addition to the organ, DeFrancesco played trumpet and saxophone, and sang occasionally.

Ted Butterman, a trumpeter well-grounded in tradition who was best known as the longtime leader of the Chicago Cubs' Dixieland jazz band, died Aug. 31. He was 87.

Frank Katz, a drummer and vocalist who spent five years (1992-97) as a member of fusion outfit Brand X but who also played with Adam Rogers, Fima Ephron, and many others around New York City, died Sept. 10 of multiple health problems. He was 55.

Eric Jackson, the jazz radio voice of Boston who hosted the *Eric in the Evening* program on WGBH-FM for more than 40 years, educating and inspiring generations of listeners, died Sept. 17 at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston of various long-term health issues. He was 72.

jaimie branch, a trumpeter and composer who was among the fastest-rising jazz stars of her generation, died Aug. 22 at her home in Brooklyn, N.Y. She was 39. branch (who preferred to style her name in lowercase) burst onto the scene in 2017 with her debut album *FLY or DIE*, which also became the name of her quartet. Her bright, brash

jaimie branch

trumpet tone and highly original improvisations, making use of an unusual tonal palette including horn-induced white noise and strangulated tones, led her to be associated with creative music's avant-garde contingent. A more accurate association, however, might be punk. As a youth in Chicago, branch had been a punk rock singer, and she brought that attitude—disaffection, irreverence, social and political outrage, and an overall outsider-ism—to her jazz playing. She was a composer of considerable gifts as well, though she downplayed that aspect of her work. In addition to the FLY or DIE quartet, branch was half of the electronic duo Anteloper (with Jason Nazary), and a third of a free-improvisation trio with bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Mike Pride. She was also a regular collaborator with guitarist Dave Gisler and worked with saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and Chicagoans Ken Vandermark and Keefe Jackson.

Anton Fier, a style-jumping downtown drummer who took influential turns with the Lounge Lizards, Bill Laswell, and John Zorn and founded his own rock group the Golden Palominos, in addition to many other notable credits as a sideman, died Sept. 21 in Switzerland of assisted suicide following years of painful physical disability. He was 66.

Henry "Pucho" Brown, a timbalero whose group Pucho and the Latin Soul Brothers played a pivotal role in the development of the Latin boogaloo sound during the 1960s, died Sept. 21 at his home in Middletown, N.Y. He was 83.

Sue Mingus, the fourth wife and widow of Charles Mingus who for over 40 years curated his music and ensured its regular public performance, died Sept. 24. She was 92. Coupled with the legendary bassist/composer for 15 years (though only legally married for four), Mingus dedicated herself to preserving and promoting her husband's work after his passing in 1979. She founded, directed, and managed three ensembles—Mingus Dynasty, Mingus Big Band, and Mingus Orchestra—to keep his compositions in front of the jazz audience. She also created a festival in his name, published several books about him, produced recordings of the Mingus repertory bands, and maintained an archive of his work and writings that became the Charles Mingus Collection at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. In addition, she nurtured many of

Sue Mingus

the artists that passed through the ranks of the Mingus ensembles, including Jimmy Owens, Richard Williams, Craig Handy, Kuumba Frank Lacy, Conrad Herwig, Jeremy Pelt, Alex Norris, and Vincent Herring, among many others.

Ronnie Cuber, a baritone saxophonist with a wide and versatile range on his instrument, died Oct. 8 at his studio in New York City. He was 80 and had been suffering from complications related to a fall he took in 2020. Though he also played tenor and soprano saxes, as well as clarinet and flute, Cuber was one of a relative handful of players who specialized in the baritone saxophone. His virtuosity and muscular style created a high demand for his services, which in turn placed Cuber in a myriad of styles and contexts. He worked in big bands, small combos, and vocal accompaniment; in bebop, hard bop, soul jazz, postbop, fusion, and Latin; and with pop, rock, funk, and blues artists, as well as NBC's *Saturday Night Live* band. His résumé as a sideman was remarkable, with credits extending from Maynard Ferguson, George Benson, and Eddie Palmieri to Charles Mingus, Hank Crawford, and Frank Zappa. In addition, he released 20 albums as a leader, each with a different ensemble—these being as wide-ranging and star-studded as his side work. ***JT***

BRANCH: ALAN NAHIGIAN; MINGUS: COURTESY OF MINGUS ARCHIVES

The late jaimie branch performed with Lester St. Louis (L) and Jason Ajemian (R) at a March 2022 Ars Nova show in Philly's Ruba club

From Country to Rock to the Outer Lands

Philadelphia's Ars Nova Workshop has found itself a permanent venue

BY A.D. AMOROSI

South Philly's Solar Myth has been many things to many people. Known until recently as Boot & Saddle, it was once the toast of post-Prohibition Philadelphia. By the 1960s, onetime Navy man Pete Del Borrello had turned it into a bar for fellow sailors, with country music as its soundtrack. Eventually, live C&W bands, crusty punks, and neighborhood new-wave types—bound by the brotherhood of Miller Draft—became part of the eerie, *Twin Peaks*-ish ambience of sawdusty floors, wagon wheels, naval tchotchkes, and dim lighting before B&S shuttered in the '90s. Brought back to life, neon-boot signage and all, in 2013 by Philly booker/entrepreneurs, Boot & Saddle became a hot place for craft beer, designer burgers, and live indie-rock gigs for seven years until closing, again, this time due to COVID's financial ravages.

"I loved seeing shows at Boot & Saddle, its original tin ceilings, its back room for live music with its intimate feel," says Mark Christman, executive and artistic director of Ars Nova Workshop (ANW), Philadelphia's primary presenter of avant-garde jazz, experimental sounds, and new classical music. Since 2000, Ars Nova has been a floating local venue curator; now it floats no more.

"We've taken over Boot & Saddle, and its back room will essentially be the full-time home to Ars Nova," says Christman, who created a fresh LLC for the occasion. "At least 92% of what Ars Nova does, going forward, is occurring here. And it will all reward the curious."

SOLAR MYTH FACTS

- Solar Myth is located at 1131 S. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19147
- Full capacity in the performance space is approximately 300 people
- Recent performers include Zoh Amba, Trevor Dunn's Trio-Convulsant, and Nels Cline

Go to arsnovaworkshop.org for the complete schedule

Renamed Solar Myth (a tribute to local legend Sun Ra), the club reopened to the public in October. Its initial bookings include bassist Trevor Dunn's Trio-Convulsant with Mary Halvorson and Ches Smith, drummer William Parker's Trio with Cooper-Moore, bassist Anthony Tidd's Quite Sane, Nicole Mitchell's Black Earth Ensemble, the War on Drugs' Charlie Hall's new all-star gathering celebrating the 50th anniversary of Miles Davis' *On the Corner*, and a Philly-themed commission for ANW "buddy" Nels Cline in a fresh quartet setting. "Nels' new piece is one of his jazzier projects," Christman says of his Cline commission.

Knowing what Boot & Saddle crowds have been (loud tattooed millennials, louder tattooed bands) and what Ars Nova crowds are (studious new-music aficionados, quiet until the screaming starts), Christman's vision for the new venue features jazz records—vinyl played by a DJ as well as for sale—and a Japanese high-five bar and retailer focused on natural wines and craft beers. "Creativity is at the center of this, whether it's improvised music or natural wine, and everything here fits into a more specific taste," he says.

Solar Myth is Ars Nova's first full-time home. In the past, the organization moved from an old theater's stage at Plays & Players (March 2000's ANW debut featured Chris Speed, now a member of the Bad Plus) to a gallery (Philadelphia's Art Alliance) to a house of worship (Christ

RYAN COLLERD

Church Neighborhood House) and several other non-traditional performance spaces. "Our first decade was definitely very DIY," Christman says, laughing. "But it also didn't take long for other entrepreneurs to show interest in partnerships. And our partnerships have been essential to our growth." Still, years of having to "rebuild the wheel, week after week" at differing locations, caused Christman and his staff "burnout," and they'd been looking for a permanent spot for some time. In this case, the pandemic presented a positive opportunity, opening the door for ANW to join a thriving neighborhood.

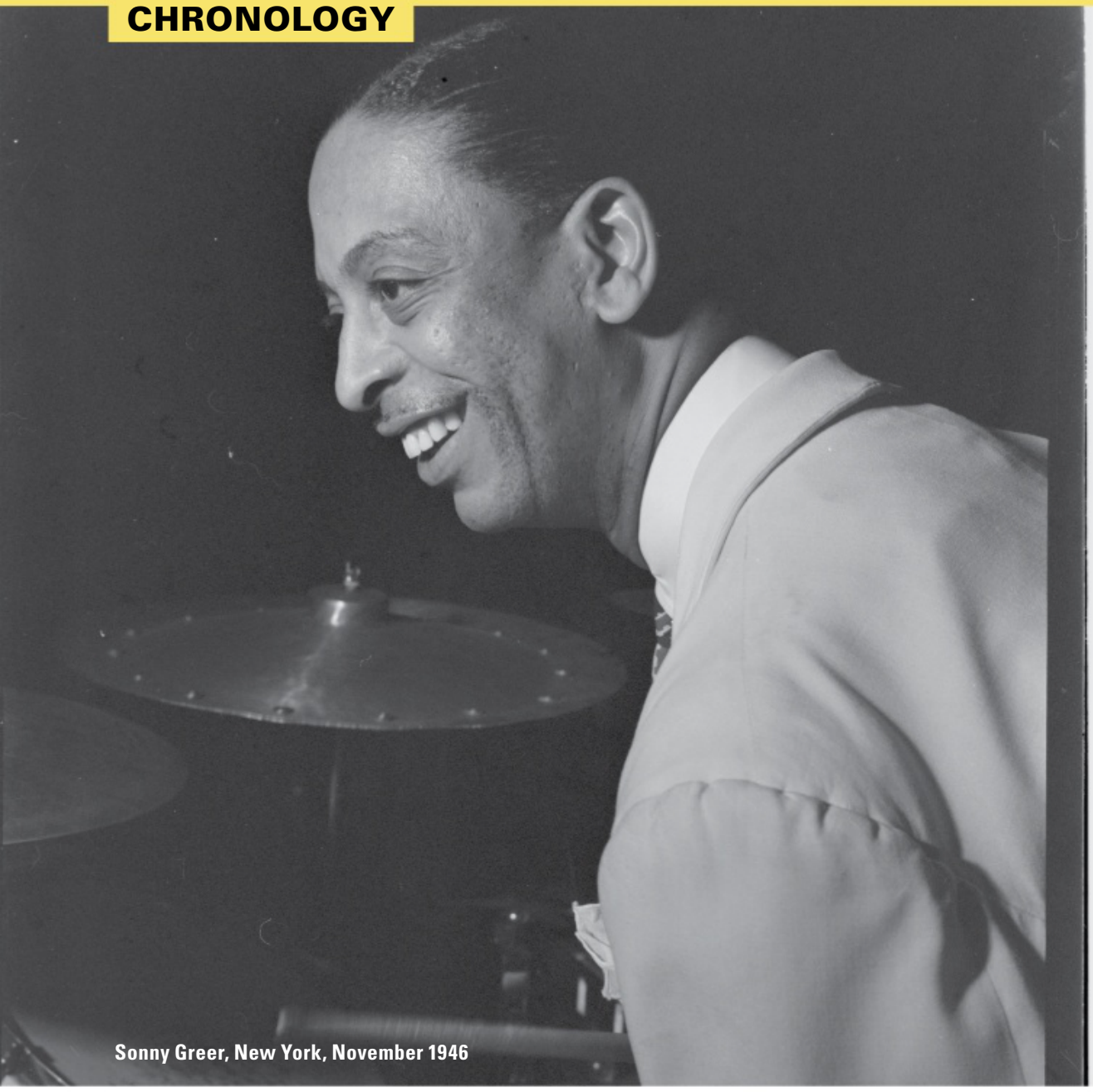
"South Philly has undergone a rich transformation that makes it nearly Center City," Christman notes, "and Solar Myth is on the Avenue of the Arts [the city's theater and live-gig beltway], which is itself a jazz corridor with the Clef Club, Chris' Jazz Café, South Jazz Parlor, the High School of the Performing Arts, and Temple U's WRTI-FM on the block. We're in good company." Best of all, there's steady space for 300 patrons in Solar Myth's performance room, and more in its bar/restaurant area run by chef/partner Evan Clancy.

"We don't need to go overboard with being a live music space six nights a week, with three sets a night," Christman adds. "We can be more organic, present live music when it feels comfortable and makes sense. There are options for standing-room *and* seated shows." In other words, ANW isn't going to overbook its live room just to keep it open; every gig will be an event, and "even when you're there without a show, there's a sense of *place* defined by Ars Nova's values."

Cline, a veteran of ANW events, says via email that Christman has the spiritual wherewithal to make this happen: "Mark is indefatigable with a dedication verging on the obsessive. … [His] passion for not just forward-leaning improvised music but music and culture in general, along with the city of Philadelphia itself, is pretty damn phenomenal." For Cline's upcoming Solar Myth commission, "[Christman] set up an impressive and wide-ranging series of meetings that did exactly what he intended them to do: give me information about Philadelphia's deep cultural history from many angles/avenues that could fire my imagination."

One final thing that Christman's particularly obsessive about is his need to create a community in and around Solar Myth, geared toward what he calls Philly's "architects" of jazz, elders from Marshall Allen to Odean Pope to Jamaaladeen Tacuma, all of whom have headlined ANW events.

"The music we revere and present isn't only the greatest American art form, it's an African American art form," he says. "In a city like Philadelphia, home to many of the architects of this art form, we want our audiences to reflect the communities whence the music came. We're working harder to build community, not just audiences." ***JT***



Sonny Greer, New York, November 1946

WILLIAM P. GOTTLIEB COLLECTION/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

FURTHER LISTENING

The Duke at Fargo 1940
(Storyville)

Hat tip to bandleader/composer Darcy James Argue for reminding me that broadcast and concert recordings present Greer at his unfettered best in greater clarity than many studio recordings.

The Great Ellington Units
(BMG/Bluebird)

Greer's swing and sensitivity shine through these sublime small group sessions led by Hodges, Stewart, and Bigard in the 1940s.

The Great Paris Concert
(Atlantic)

Tremendous document from 1963, whose diversity (concert works, classic arrangements, popular hits, deep cuts) illuminates Woodyard's versatility.

Drumming for the Duke

SONNY GREER and SAM WOODYARD kept Ellington in the swing

BY MARK STRYKER

Asked to choose Duke Ellington's most valuable sidemen, most folks would likely start with Johnny Hodges, followed by any number of the additional cavalcade of stars. Popular picks would include Harry Carney, Billy Strayhorn, Bubber Miley, Ben Webster, Cootie Williams, and others. But you know whose names probably wouldn't appear on most lists?

The drummers.

The two longest-tenured drummers with Ellington, Sonny Greer (1924-51) and Sam Woodyard (1955-66), were defining voices of the maestro's sound world. Innumerable masterpieces, from "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Caravan," and "Harlem Air Shaft" to *Ellington at Newport*, *Such Sweet Thunder*, and *Afro-Bossa*, simply would not sound the same without their profound contributions. Yet neither enjoys a reputation today commensurate with their role in shaping the sound of the band. Nor do they appear as widely celebrated as others within the brethren of big-band drummers, including Chick Webb, Jo Jones, Gene Krupa, Dave Tough, Buddy Rich, Sonny Payne, and Mel Lewis.

Perhaps the demands of playing with Ellington—the sheer variety of rhythm, groove, color, texture, mood, and dynamics within his scores—require a subtle fealty to the ensemble that makes it difficult for a drummer to stand out. Greer and Woodyard are more than trap-set drummers. They are first-rate *percussionists*. At the same time, their skills at underscoring the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of America's greatest vernacular orchestra sometimes overshadow just how hard they can flat-out swing.

Bottom line: If no jazz band can be better than its drummer, and the Duke Ellington Orchestra remains the finest large ensemble in the history of the idiom, then Greer and Woodyard rank among the most underrated drummers in jazz.

Greer started playing drums in vaudeville along the Jersey Shore as a teenager before moving to Washington, D.C. in 1919, where he met his destiny: Ellington. By the mid-'20s Ellington was leading his own vanguard jazz orchestra in New York, with Greer as his anchorman. "Greer was not the best reader of music, but he was the world's best percussionist reactor," Ellington wrote in *Music Is My Mistress*. "When he heard a ping, he responded with the most apropos pong."

The RCA recording of "Black and Tan Fantasy" (1927) offers an early illustration. Greer lays down a smoldering march beat, and the way he frames the arrangement tells a story. At the end of the first chorus, he crashes his cymbal on beat 4 but grabs it with his free hand to dramatically stop the sound. He does it again eight bars later, and at the end of the next eight bars defies expectations with three syncopated baps on the offbeats to cap the section.

Photos from the 1930s and '40s show Greer surrounded by a symphony orchestra's worth of percussion: snare drum, multiple tom-toms, bass drum, hi-hat, myriad cymbals, timpani, temple blocks, cowbell,

Sam Woodyard, Copenhagen, January 1967

©JAN PERSSON/CTSIMAGES

gongs, and tubular bells. He punctuates arrangements with inspired rickey-ticks, rustles, rimshots, and rings. He has the timing of a magician, the touch of a pickpocket, the taste of a connoisseur.

His mallets sweep across the tom-toms on "Caravan" (1937), conjuring a misterioso journey across the desert sands of the Middle East. Greer is also a wizard with wire brushes. On his 1941 feature "Jumpin' Punkins" he sometimes turns them around to play cymbal crashes and accents with the rubber handles. (I cribbed this observation from Mel Lewis' penetrating 1989 radio series on the history of jazz drumming hosted by Loren Schoenberg.)

Finally, Greer swings his ass off on tracks like "Dallas Doings" (1933), whose relaxed momentum and riffing foreshadow Old Testament Basie, or any of the 1940-42 classics like "Harlem Air Shaft" and "Cotton Tail." As the '40s wore on, his heavy drinking led to increasingly erratic live performances, until Ellington gently let him go in 1951. Louis Bellson gave the band fresh energy and stability for four years, before Woodyard came aboard in 1955 at the age of 30.

While he was influenced by swing-era heroes Webb, Jones, Catlett, Tough, and Jimmy Crawford, Woodyard also brought a modern ride cymbal beat and contemporary snap to the bandstand. There were idiosyncrasies too: Woodyard often lets ensemble figures pass by without setting them up in the manner of most postwar big-band drummers, who tend to shadow the lead trumpet rhythms. Woodyard's approach at times robs the ensemble of some definition, but the compensatory rewards are that it allows the music to breathe and groove with the borderless expanse of human feeling. That's EXACTLY Ellington's aesthetic.

Every composition on *Such Sweet Thunder* (1957), Ellington and Strayhorn's peerless suite inspired by Shakespeare, finds the drummer in a different mode of discourse. He stalks the swing rhythm on the title track like a panther with a backbeat. He glides through the 3/4 waltz time of "Lady Mac" with sly, insouciant patterns on the hi-hat; in the coda, he does set up the band with tension-building accents on beat 1 for five bars in a row. On "Half the Fun," Woodyard invents a beguiling quasi-Habanera as singular as any beat in the canon.

The majestic achievement of Ellington's *Afro Bossa* (1962-63), a carnival of neo-Caribbean rhythm and gutbucket exotica, again captures the casual virtuosity of Woodyard's imagination. He creates novel beats on track after track. And if you want to hear the drummer down home in the core of the jazz tradition, look no further than Paul Gonsalves' 27 rocking blues choruses on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" at Newport in 1956. Woodyard is as much responsible for the nuclear fission as the saxophonist.

"Sam Woodyard?" Ellington once summed up. "He's a swinger." ***JT***

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Louis Hayes

The distinguished drummer and NEA Jazz Master comments on Elvin Jones, Art Farmer, Ahmad Jamal and more

BY ASHLEY KAHN

The last year has seen Louis Hayes notch a number of estimable career achievements. In July, he was named an NEA Jazz Master, an honor he will receive at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. next April. In May, he marked his 85th birthday. And in 2021, he released his 18th album as a leader or co-leader—*Crisis* (Savant)—with a title inspired by the current political and social climate, and a talented multigenerational lineup that speaks to his continuing stature: Steve Nelson, Camille Thurman, Dezron Douglas, David Hazeltine, Abraham Burton. His schedule remains steady—busy but comfortable: Hayes still hits the road to perform and to teach (in Denver and at McGill in Montreal in October) and appears at one of his usual Manhattan haunts, Smoke Jazz Club, in December.

Hayes' history impresses both with its highlights and its musical consistency. A product of the postbop wave of the early '50s, he kicked off his professional career at the ripe age of 15 in his native Detroit, where he rapidly developed a reputation for a distinctively melodic and economic approach to the drum kit; his skill providing complementary backing of soloists stood out from the start. His first big break came early—in 1956, at 19, when he was recruited to take on the drum chair in Horace Silver's groundbreaking quintet, bringing him to New York City (he's never left) and elevating him to the top rank of the jazz scene (he's still there too). In his first two decades in the spotlight, he proved his flexibility supporting a wide range of headliners: Silver, Yusef Lateef, Cannonball Adderley, Oscar Peterson, McCoy Tyner. He also developed a reputation as an effective team player with various bassists—Doug Watkins and Sam Jones, to name two. The Jones-Hayes connection was especially celebrated and long-lived, serving as the foundation of the drummer's initial forays into leading his own collectives in the 1970s.

These accomplishments and others all came into play as Hayes participated in his first Before & After for *JazzTimes*, which took place in the big-band rehearsal room at New York University's Jazz Department and was introduced by the program chair, composer/saxophonist Dave Pietro; more than 30 students were in attendance. After answering a few questions regarding his early days and musical roots—like noting his mother was an aunt to Prince Rogers Nelson—he proceeded to listen intently to each track and, for more than two hours, addressed his responses primarily to the students.

Some Before & Afters find the musician-on-the-spot digging deep into each track. With others, the responses are more about who than what, the music triggering stories and memories and lessons of the past. This one proved more

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of the latter type, with Hayes slipping noticeably into the present tense at times when speaking of departed friends.

1. Art Farmer Quintet

"Fantasy in 'D'"

(from *Art Farmer Quintet at Boomers #2,* East Wind). Farmer, flugelhorn; Clifford Jordan, tenor saxophone; Cedar Walton, piano; Sam Jones, bass; Billy Higgins, drums. Recorded in 1976.

BEFORE: This is a Cedar Walton composition—the title escapes me. He wrote that during the time he was in the Jazz Messengers, but this is a different version. This is something we used to play, Freddie Hubbard and myself. We lived in the same building in Brooklyn, and Cedar lived around the corner at that time. Cedar is a wonderful writer and we spent a lot of time together, our wives had a club together, and we made a lot of history together.

[*Listens more*] Now that sounds like Clifford Jordan. When he came to New York he joined the Horace Silver Quintet and Junior Cook took his place after he had to leave for some family stuff, then Horace asked Junior to stay because Junior sounded closer to Hank Mobley.

AFTER: I thought that was Art Farmer because he and Clifford played very well together. Art was in Horace Silver's band when I first came and joined the band and he was a big help to me. Very wonderful musician and a wonderful person. And Billy Higgins—yes, yes, yes! I really enjoyed Billy—his mind, his creativity. He is a good friend, a good person. But all of those guys are.

Bobby Timmons was the first one to introduce me to Boomers. Boomers was located in the lower Village and it was very important. People liked to come there and a lot of hip musicians of note would play there. During that time I was out of town a lot with Oscar Peterson, but I played there and made a couple recordings there with Cedar Walton, Sam Jones, and Clifford Jordan. Some places just kind of catch on like that—I think the feeling was a little different: a nice place, a good feeling, and a lot of fun. Things were not expensive during that time. Before Boomers it was Slugs', and now this club Smoke on 106th Street and Broadway. There's always been a few places here in New York like that. It made a big difference.

2. Doug Watkins

"Andre's Bag"

(from *Soulnik*, New Jazz). Watkins, cello; Yusef Lateef, flute; Hugh Lawson, piano; Herman Wright, bass; Lex Humphries, drums. Recorded in 1960.

BEFORE: It sounds like Sam Jones. Sam and myself, we spent so much time together. He used to call me his right hand. I didn't know Sam was that much older than me—he was 12 or 13 years older than I was, and he was the cause of Bobby Timmons and myself joining Cannonball's band. I was with Horace Silver at the time, and Sam, Bobby, and myself were playing at the original Birdland at 52nd Street and Broadway on a Monday night, which was an off night for the regular groups. When the job was over Sam said that Cannon was leaving Miles and wanted to put his own group back together. Sam and Cannon were from Florida and Sam had been in Cannon's first band. So Cannon asked Bobby and myself if we'd like to join the band and after some negotiating we decided to do it, and I'm very happy that I made that decision.

"Horace [Silver] said something to Doug [Watkins] and Doug didn't like it, so he said, 'Well, that's the way the mop flops—and I quit.'"

[*Listens to flute solo*] I never heard this. Is that … brother Yusef? Definitely Yusef. [*Listens more*] It's Doug. That was Doug.

AFTER: I never heard Doug that much playing cello. He was a very accomplished bassist and he was instrumental in getting me here to New York with Horace. We lived together for a period of time in different places in Manhattan, so we got to know each other very well. He left us too early—I don't know what year it was but it was very early in his life. I do recall he made an album like that.

Doug … we used to have different conversations about music, and I can tell one funny story. We were appearing with Horace at a place called the Cork 'n' Bib in Queens, and this was the end of Doug's career with Horace. Horace said something to Doug and Doug didn't like it, so he said, "Well, that's the way the mop flops—and I quit." I can't recall what Horace said, but then Horace got the bassist Teddy Kotick, who had been around for a while and had played with Charlie Parker.

The Cork 'n' Bib was another nice place to play, and it was a nice person who owned the place—Charlie Graziano. We had a good relationship. I had the opportunity to play there with Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge in my early twenties. Roy once hit a note so high it scared me—I almost dropped the drumsticks! I won't forget that one.

3. Ahmad Jamal

"It's You or No One"

(live from the Newport Jazz Festival, available in streaming format through Wolfgang's Vault). Jamal, piano; Israel Crosby, bass; Vernel Fournier, drums. Recorded in 1959.

BEFORE: [*Immediately*] That's Ahmad Jamal. I can tell by his style, plus Vernel and Israel at that time, they were in his trio. Sometimes when you get a group that comes together, it just fits. It's just magic. That's something that doesn't happen too often and they were like that. Vernel, when I first heard him play, he was playing so much with his left hand here and, with a mallet in his right hand, all this [*gestures a drum pattern*]. I thought it was two drummers! It was very unique, something like the feeling in New Orleans that was very clever. Special people come from New Orleans. And Israel Crosby on bass—he was one of a kind. I don't know if he did too much after this, but when he was with Ahmad it was special. They really made a lot of serious music together.

With Cannonball we had the opportunity of playing opposite them on several occasions, like in theaters in Chicago, Washington, D.C. We played the Apollo opposite them—we all had a very good feeling together. Ahmad was a person that made people really listen to him. Miles and a lot of people listened to him

Hayes at Birdland, July 2012

"You really had to know your instrument in Detroit. If you didn't they would let you know, not only the musicians but the audience. You wouldn't get a second chance."

to give them that direction. I have a very nice picture at home of Ahmad and myself at the Detroit [Jazz] Festival one year when I was there.

I know what this tune is, but I can't recall the name.

STUDENT: "It's You or No One."
That's it!

4. Makaya McCraven

"Ecaroh"

(from *Deciphering the Message*, Blue Note). Original musicians: Horace Silver, piano; Curly Russell, bass; Art Blakey, drums. Additional musicians: McCraven, drums, guitar; Joel Ross, vibraphone. Recorded in 1952 and 2021.

BEFORE: I was wondering when we were going to get to it—that's one of Horace Silver's compositions. I didn't hear him playing on that, though. It's a little different arrangement. I don't have any idea who's playing but it's his composition. I wasn't in the band when he wrote that. Horace wrote so many compositions—he was the best at it, probably more than anyone at the time except Bobby Timmons or Monk.

AFTER: Oh, that's right, it's "Ecaroh." Yes.

Did you catch what was going on? It's the original recording but it's also been worked on.
It sounded strange. What sounded strange to me was the way that it was written. It was altogether different than the "Ecaroh" that I knew. I first heard it with the Jazz Messengers—that arrangement. This was altogether different. Was that the original interpretation that Horace wrote at that time, or did he do something different?

It's actually Makaya who did that, using the original recording, sampling and looping it, and adding new instrumentation—a new generation paying tribute, using cut-and-paste methods.
I haven't paid attention to it. I did do a tribute to Horace after he passed away for Blue Note [*Serenade for Horace*, 2018]. You know, even after I left Horace, we stayed close for all those years, and while I was with him he wrote a couple of compositions for me—one was called "Mellow D" and the other one was "Swingin' the Samba." That second one came about because back then we played 40/20 [40 minutes on, 20 minutes off] and I used to get up early and play a samba beat, so Horace wrote that composition.

5. T.J. Fowler

"Red Hot Blues"

(78rpm single, National). Fowler, piano; John Lawton, trumpet; Lee Gross, alto saxophone; Walter Cox, tenor saxophone; Henry Ivory, bass; Clarence Stamp, drums. Recorded c. 1948.

BEFORE: I don't have any idea who that is. It started off like something from some bagpipes! This sounds like the '40s. Is that Illinois Jacquet? No, it's not him.

AFTER: T.J. Fowler? I heard about him but I don't know too much about him.

He had a drummer—Clarence Stamp.
No kidding? That one really got me. I would like to have this one. Thank you for remembering Clarence. Clarence and I were cousins—he married my grandmother's sister's daughter. He was my first real teacher, he knew all those rudiments: how to read, how to use brushes. He even taught me how to pass sticks from one drummer to another. Basic things, and I would go home and practice them. But the first thing he did was change me from playing left-handed to right-handed. I was left-handed. My father said, "Let him do what he wants to do." But Clarence said, "No, if he's going to play,

Use this QR code to check out Zoom session video from the Before & After listening sessions. Accessible to *JazzTimes* members only; if you're interested in membership, go to jazztimes.com/memberships.

he's going to play right." He was the most important person in my developing years coming up. He definitely fixed me up. That's when I was a kid, maybe 13 or 14.

One thing he told me I always remember—he said, "You want to play the drums? Look out at the audience, and if you don't see anyone patting their feet, you ain't playing shit. You're in charge of the band. If anything goes wrong, they're going to look at you like it's your fault." I took that a certain way as I got older because *everybody* has to be able to do their part, and if somebody can't do their part, sometimes that's *your* fault.

But I never liked people telling me how to play. The trumpet player wants you to play this way for him, the saxophone player wants you to do stuff for them. When I was pretty young, I developed the attitude about those things and I went my own way.

I didn't really listen to too many drummers, actually—I listened more to horn players and pianists and other people in the band. I listened to Charlie Parker a lot when I was very young. I learned how to sing his solos verbatim and developed a direction that I wanted to go in. As a youngster, I didn't want to play for any singers or blues bands, things like that. I liked a lot of different music but I only wanted to go one way: myself. See, I left Detroit before Motown. I wanted to go in my own direction.

6. Elvin Jones

"Keiko's Birthday March"

(from *Revival: Live at Pookie's Pub*, Blue Note). Jones, drums; Joe Farrell, tenor saxophone; Billy Greene, piano; Wilbur Little, bass. Recorded in 1967.

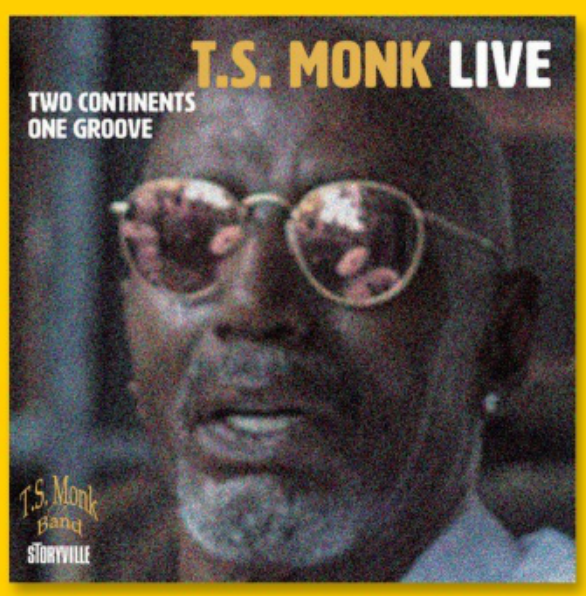
BEFORE: Art Blakey can do this very well, but I think I hear Elvin Jones. [*Laughs, listens more*] Now you can really tell it's Elvin. Elvin used to amaze me when I was young. I used to see him at the World Stage in Detroit. I was playing but I wasn't yet 21 and too young to get in the clubs, but I would see Elvin. He came from Pontiac, Michigan but he had moved to Detroit when I saw him. I never really hung out with Elvin one-on-one for any period of time, but we had a good feeling together.

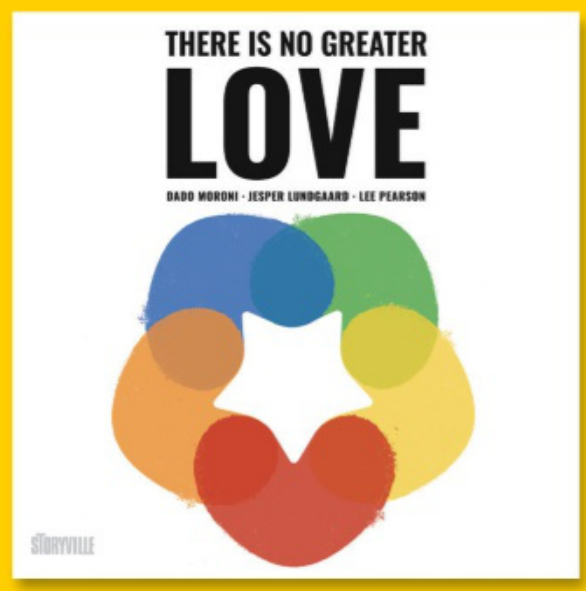
The World Stage was a special place—the musicians ran it, and to be invited onstage you had to be of a certain caliber. The musicians that you were around knew their instruments very well. They had really practiced and studied. For every instrument, you had somebody who played it very well in Detroit during that time. You really had to know your instrument. If you didn't they would let you know, not only the musicians but the audience. You wouldn't get a second chance. Detroit was rough.

I had no idea of Elvin's concept in Detroit. Elvin was playing in such a way that I wouldn't even think about trying to figure out what he was doing. I was listening to straight time—Kenny Clarke, who was a big influence on me, and the sound he and Percy Heath got together, the direction they were going in.

Elvin is 10 years older than I am. When he came to New York I had been here for a little period of time, and he was playing with different people in a more straight way. He could play straight if he wanted to. People didn't hear who he really was until he got with Coltrane, I think. Then the real Elvin Jones showed up, and everybody knows him from that period. They don't know him from playing with J.J. Johnson and Sweets Edison and people like that. ***JT***

Read the rest of Louis Hayes' Before & After session, including comments on music by Terri Lyne Carrington, Jack DeJohnette, Oscar Peterson, Eric Harland, Philly Joe Jones, and Brian Blade, at jazztimes.com.





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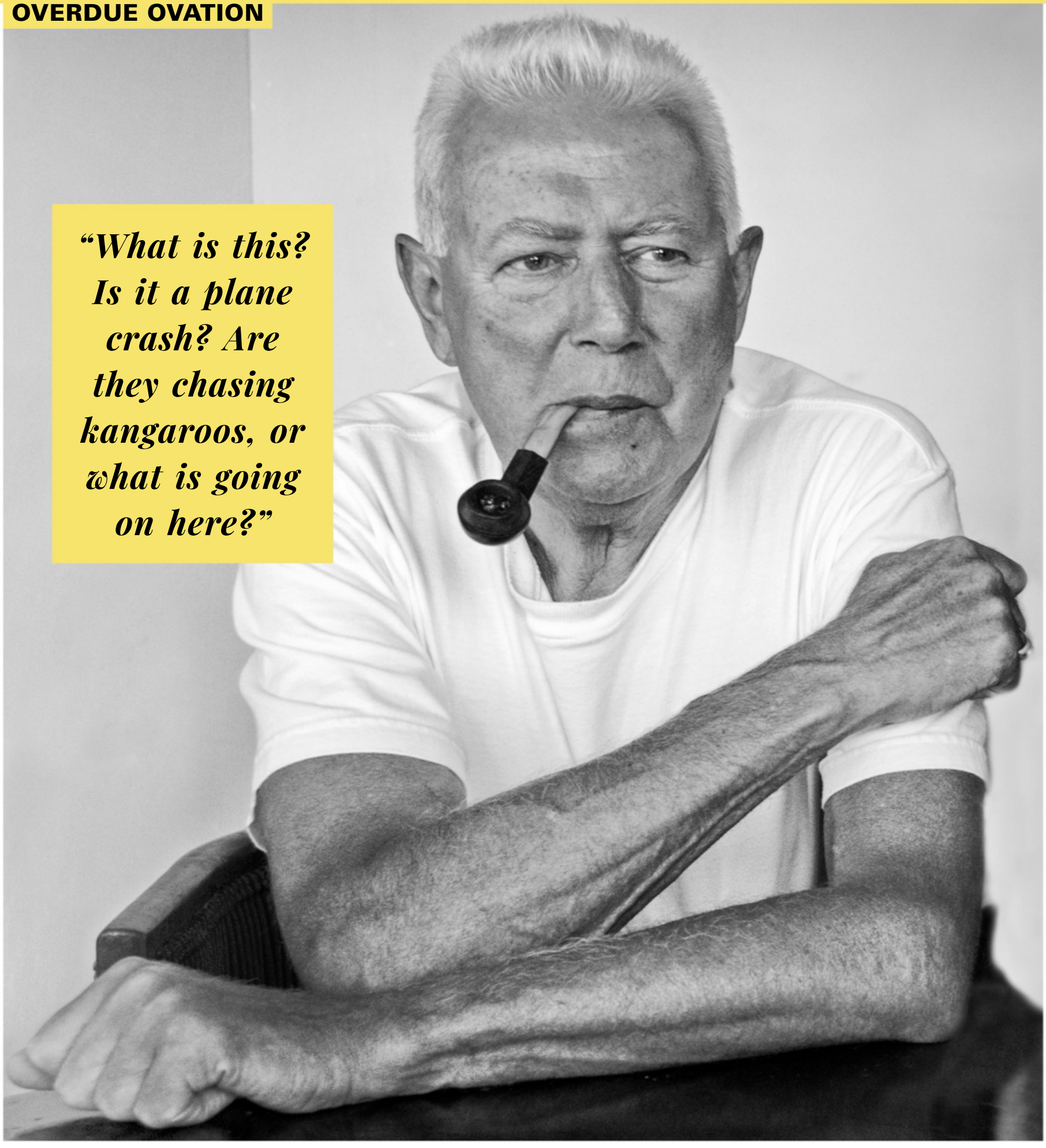


"What is this? Is it a plane crash? Are they chasing kangaroos, or what is going on here?"

Han Bennink

Eighty years haven't mellowed this Dutch firebrand

BY BRET SJERVEN

As the lights dim, a dog wags its tail as it looks up at its master, a tall, clean-cut man whose silhouette fills the doorway leading to the Roode Bioscoop's cozy dressing room. The pair are tough to separate, the young pup's presence as necessary as drumsticks to Han Bennink, the canine's doting owner. Bennink takes a moment to pet his pal before heading up the aisle to perform for a small but erudite audience made up mostly of friends and longtime admirers.

The Roode Bioscoop, a former Communist movie theater (*roode*, or red, relating to the venue's political leanings rather than a wall color), is currently Bennink's home away from home, his favorite venue to perform at in Amsterdam and the place where he celebrated his 80th birthday in April with three nights of performances.

This particular evening, Bennink is playing with bass clarinetist Joris Roelefs, a favorite musical sparring partner. The

TON MIJS

program is billed as a tribute to Wayne Shorter. It's immediately obvious that the material is of no importance to Bennink, as he plays in his merrily bombastic way without much worry about the melodic direction provided by Roelefs. Bennink even goes so far as to loudly voice his preference for the much more esoteric work of the legendary saxophonist/composer's lesser-known brother, Alan Shorter.

Here you have the yin and yang of Han Bennink: a shy, nature-loving older gentleman who happens to erupt into mischief and fiery swing when he gets behind a drum set.

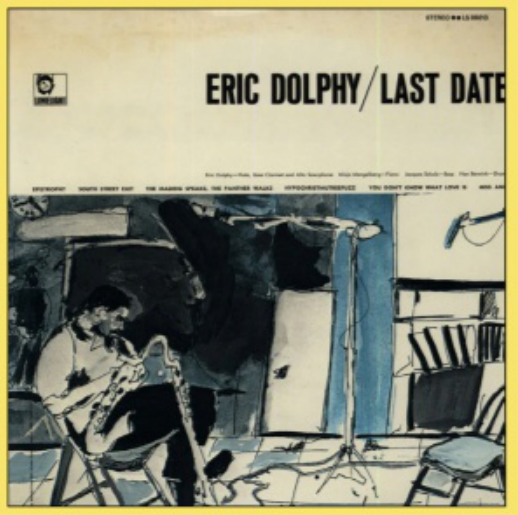
He's been the heartbeat of the Dutch improvised music scene for nearly six decades. In that time, he's ascended through the ranks from an itinerant, holding the drum chair for generations of Dutch jazz cognoscenti and big-time international artists (including Johnny Griffin, Eric Dolphy, Dexter Gordon, and Sonny Rollins), to a true innovator in the world of free improvisation, most famously with the Instant Composers Pool, a musical collective he established with pianist Misha Mengelberg and woodwind blaster Willem Breuker. Though Breuker soon left the triumvirate and Mengelberg passed away in 2017, ICP has remained the most iconic of European improvising groups, and the ICP Orchestra still plays regularly around the world.

Bennink describes his approach to the drums as "totally Dutch." When asked if he cares to elaborate, he says, "No. I like [Piet] Mondrian. [Vincent] Van Gogh. I like Dutch. I like the landscape. I'm flat. I like to always see the horizon."

Two early influences were Kenny Clarke—"the one and only for me"—and Bennink's own father, a concert percussionist, clarinetist and jazz fan. "I have two left hands, is what they say in Holland," Bennink says self-deprecatingly. "My father did everything for me. He saw my talent. He provided my drums. He brought me to Gene Krupa and Benny Goodman—that was his thing. [And] I did play with my father. My first recording we did in the studio [together]. I think I was 13."

Over time, Bennink also acquired an unwieldy assortment of instruments, which broadened his musical outlook. "I had a huge Citroën car," he recalls, "the kind where they sell ice creams now in the Vondelpark, full of drums. Tympani, marimbas, mridangam, tablas, all that stuff. It became a sort of secure thing. I always thought, 'When I can't do this [making a particular sound], I'll later go on to my tablas.'"

RECOMMENDED LISTENING



Eric Dolphy: *Last Date*
(Limelight, 1965)

Sonny Rollins: *Rollins in Holland: The 1967 Studio & Live Recordings*
(Resonance, 2020)

Peter Brötzmann: *Nipples*
(BRÖ, 1968)

Han Bennink/Misha Mengelberg: *Bennink Mengelberg*
(ICP, 1982)

Clusone Trio: *I Am an Indian*
(Gramavision, 1995)

Uri Caine: *Sonic Boom*
(816, 2013)

Bennink's main goal in these formative years was to develop a distinctive sound. "I just wanted to play music," he says. "I just wanted to be there. And *ching-chika-ding-chika-ding*, of course, is fucking difficult, but it is done *sooo* fantastic by all the fantastic American timekeepers. Think of something else. You don't come from Brooklyn, you come from Loosdrecht! The other [Dutch jazz drummers], they depended very much on imitation. But we found a way."

"We," in this case, refers to the ICP, which was founded in 1967. The previous year, when Bennink played the Newport Jazz Festival in a quartet with Mengelberg, he was still playing in a recognizable modern jazz style; by 1970, he had moved on to total improvisation. "I hate the word 'free jazz,'" he notes. "[Avant-garde tenor saxophonist] Frank Wright said to me, 'What does that mean, free jazz? We don't get paid? People get in for free?' I like to call it improvised music. For me, playing in a pulse is exactly the same as playing the rhythm. There is no difference for me. It is only timing."

The way Bennink describes the ICP Orchestra's sound is memorable: "We still can swing like hell. We can swing like a Jimmie Lunceford band, man, I'm telling you. At the same time, there is something happening. 'What is this? Is it a plane crash? Are they chasing kangaroos, or what is going on here?' I think that is a fantastic thing."

As the ICP matured, its reach extended further within improvised music and across national boundaries. It can easily be argued that Bennink was instrumental in furthering the European advancements of the blustery Peter Brötzmann and Fred van Hove, along with more singularly abstract musicians like Derek Bailey and Evan Parker. These days, inevitably, he's come to be seen as an elder statesman, someone that younger musicians should get to know. Bennink enjoys playing with many of them—he singles out guitarist Reinier Baas, saxophonist Ben van Gelder, and trumpeter Ian Cleaver as particular favorites of the "third and fourth generation"—but he adds, "I have to say something: The musicians who are coming from music schools or the conservatory, they mostly play bebop and so on. So most of the time, I got hired by young bebop players. They wanted me to play *fucking* time. After a while, I like to destroy it. I like to go in a different direction, or not what they expect."

True Bennink aficionados would expect nothing less.

In the past few years, there have been dramatic shifts in the Dutch creative music scene. The departure of the original director of the Bimhuis (a key Amsterdam venue for jazz and other non-classical styles), the recent loss of government funding from the Fonds Podium Kunsten (the arts support grant system that had supported ICP for decades), and the pandemic have truly shaken the Netherlands' music community.

"I feel like I'm starting from zero," Bennink acknowledges. "At my age I don't have to worry about money. I'm lucky. But I'm a fucking old guy. All the other beautiful young people … I fear for them, and I feel very sorry for them because, as they say, 'It's a long way to Tipperary.'"

Even so, this improviser par excellence can still find reasons to be cheerful. "I just followed my intuition," he says. "It's what I did from when I started playing with my father. I had many, many doubts in my life, of course. But I'm still happy I'm here. I'm totally happy that I can play with people I really want. I want it to be like that as long as I go." ***JT***

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

SONNY ROLLINS at the turning point, as captured in a definitive new biography

By Aidan Levy

ATSUHIKO KAWABATA (COURTESY OF HANAKO KAWABATA)

Sonny Rollins on the Williamsburg Bridge, October 7, 1961

TOWARD THE END OF THE 1950S, the already renowned tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins managed to kick his addiction to heroin. But he soon realized that getting clean of one drug wouldn't free him from other temptations: cigarettes, alcohol, unhealthy food. Nor could it wipe away all the bad energy—insecurity, anger, envy, depression—that coursed through the life of a working jazz musician. And so, with the support of his wife Lucille, Rollins resolved to take a sabbatical from the stage and the recording studio, beginning in the summer of 1959 and lasting roughly two years. Instead of paying gigs, he oriented his time around personal health and spiritual growth. He drastically changed his diet, took up yoga, lifted weights, and engaged in other regular, intense exercise. He read deeply in philosophy and religion, investigating esoteric belief systems like Rosicrucianism, and took an anthropology course at Cooper Union.

Most famously of all, he brought his horn to the Williamsburg Bridge, near his apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side, for epic solo practice sessions in the open air, hour after hour, night after night.

In his new book **Saxophone Colossus: The Life and Music of Sonny Rollins** (written with Rollins' full participation), Aidan Levy expertly examines this crucial period. The following excerpt finds the saxophonist still in the midst of his Bridge time, but beginning—with encouragement from his equally legendary friends—to feel that he could safely transition back to performance and a richer public life.

ON September 7, 1960, Sonny turned 30. The next day, he recorded his thoughts on the milestone in his journal. "Birthday now past but tendencies toward disruption still exist," he wrote. It seems he violated his strict diet and succumbed to the urge for a cigarette. "By the very documenting of these

transgressions I am demonstrating my *awakening* strength which will come into full bloom at such time as I have suffered through the various manifestations of these problems."

During his sabbatical, Sonny did maintain a modest social life. He had strictly sworn off any commercial endeavors until he was ready, but he had befriended maverick Armenian American producer George Avakian, 11 years his senior. Avakian had signed Miles [Davis] to Columbia and, in 1960, produced the *Billboard* No. 1 pop album *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart* and the Everly Brothers' "Cathy's Clown," a No. 1 single for five weeks that summer. Avakian had a disarming, soft-spoken charm that belied his status as a major label bigwig—and he loved Sonny.

They first met years earlier at Basin Street when Sonny was with Brown-Roach [the mid-'50s quintet co-led by trumpeter Clifford Brown and drummer Max Roach] and began talking during set breaks. With Sonny, "You could sit down and have a serious talk about almost anything, because he kept up with the news of the day and events of the world, and he had good opinions, thoughtful opinions," Avakian recalled. They became friends, and in October 1960, Avakian invited Sonny to attend the World Series. Sonny gladly agreed to go to Yankee Stadium to see his team against the Pittsburgh Pirates, October 9–10. During the national anthem, Sonny did not stand, in protest of social

> "DEAREST LUCILLE, ... THERE IS NO DENYING THAT I HAVE PREPARED MYSELF ... EVERY NOTE THAT I PLAY WILL BE PLAYED FOR YOU."

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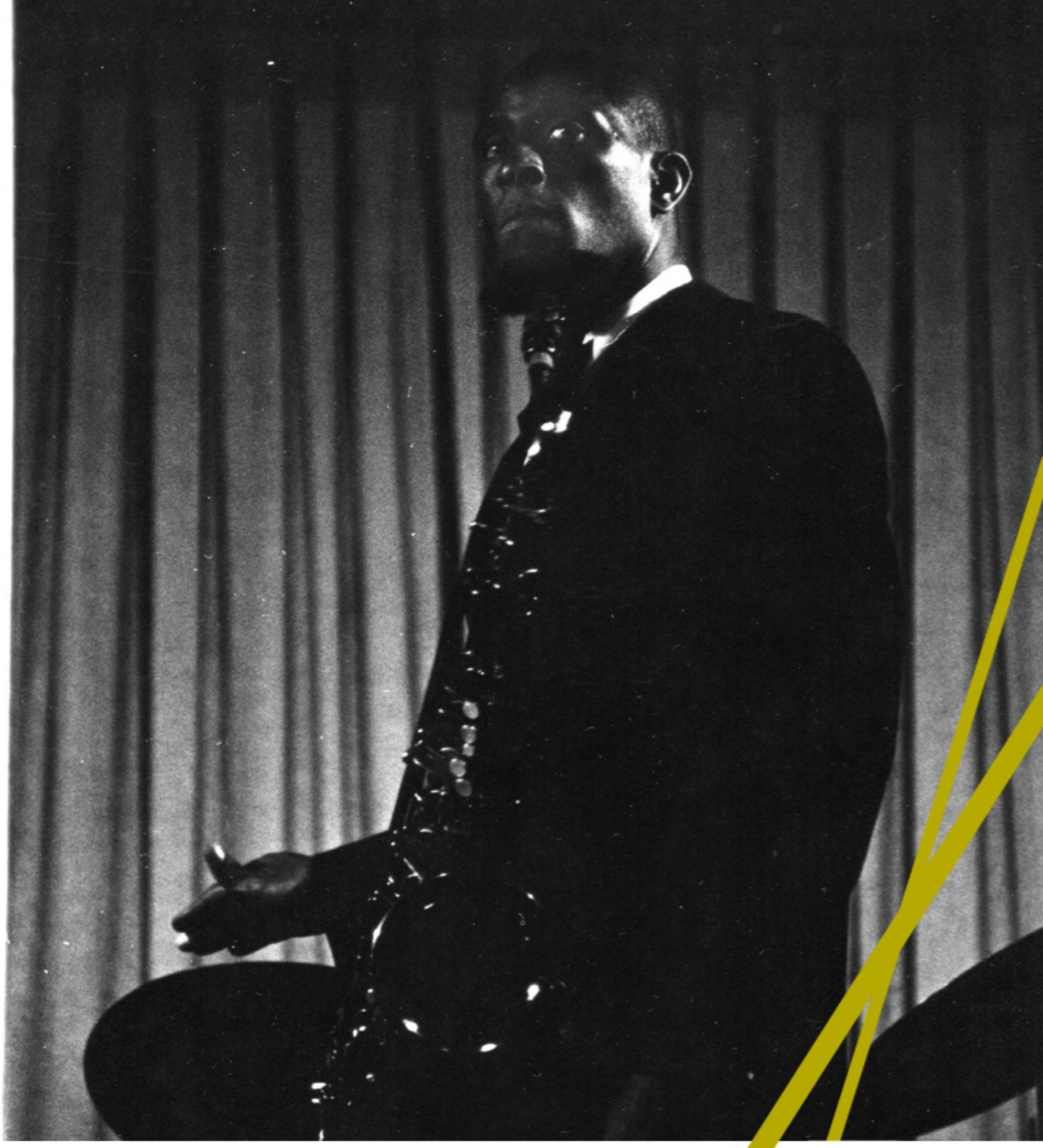


Right: Rollins at the Jazz Gallery, soon after his return from the Bridge sabbatical, November 21, 1961
Left: Sonny and Charles Mingus at Mingus' surprise 56th birthday party, New York, April 1978

ROBERT PARENT (COURTESY OF DALE PARENT/THE BOB PARENT ARCHIVE)

injustice.

"We had very good seats," Avakian recalled. "Sonny was very knowledgeable, which was helpful, and we happened to hit some pretty good games," though the Pirates won both. Despite the Yankees' series loss, it cemented their bond, which led to a business relationship. "We just kind of drifted into it," Avakian said. "Nothing very special. It just grew out of friendship."

Three months later, in January 1961, there were rumors that Sonny would be ending his sabbatical and appearing at the Birdhouse in Chicago. He never showed up, though, and Donald Byrd took his place. "The management of the club said he was still practicing and experimenting," read the report in *Down Beat*. "Rumor has it that he does his practicing in the middle of a well-known bridge in New York City."

Sonny had begun to realize that the sabbatical might have to end. "I love you," he wrote Lucille in one of his daily love notes, "and we are nearing the time when our labors of the present will be our pleasures of everyday."

On March 28, 1961, Sonny's restlessness and an early spring malaise was the subject of a two-page letter: "Dearest Lucille," it began. They were both experiencing some bouts of depression as the seasons changed. "As you know, hot weather incites a listlessness in me which is extremely dangerous to the progress I have made. Speaking of progress, I have reached the point to which my endeavors have been aimed and this in itself can cause me to become impatient and bored if I am not careful to guard against it." Upon his return, counterintuitively, Sonny looked forward to being able "to relax more and take more vacations." But one more summer on sabbatical remained. "However difficult this last summer might loom there is no denying that I have prepared myself and am able and ready to make the above plans materialize. Every note that I play will be played for you. The trials and hardships of these days together has invoked in me the highest feeling of devotion towards you and indeed your presence has brought about the success which I have definitely achieved."

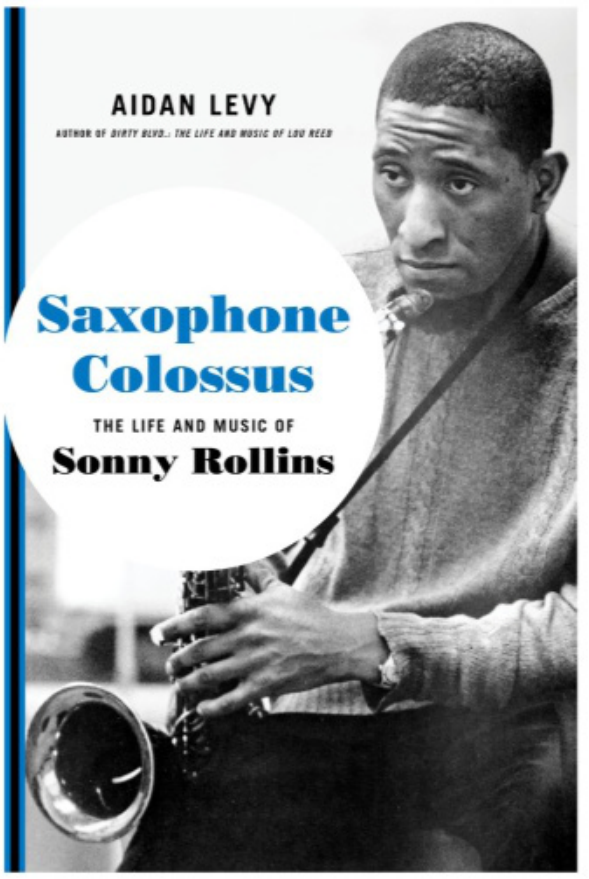
The following week, Sonny hinted at his reentry in a five-page handwritten response to a letter from Marty Burns, a college sophomore writing a paper on the contemporary state of jazz. Burns, who hardly expected any response at all from the jazz scene's most enigmatic missing person, was shocked; it made for quite a term paper. Sonny had read a *New York Times* article detailing

"CONTRARY TO SOME BELIEFS JAZZ MUSIC IS NOT THE SOLE PROPERTY OF ANY ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE! ... JAZZ, AS MEN, HAS NO LIMITS, NO BOUNDARIES SAVE THOSE IT WOULD INFLICT UPON ITSELF."

plans to create a network of jazz clubs across the Soviet Union as a bulwark against the spread of capitalism. To Sonny, however, jazz was a "tremendous force for understanding and peace" that could have the power to ease Cold War tensions. Sonny believed that the "National Art Form" should be used as a diplomatic tool to promote multicultural tolerance. "Contrary to some beliefs jazz music is not the sole property of any one group of people!" he wrote. "Jazz music, while no doubt utilizing the 'rhythm' of such warmer climated areas as Africa, adds to that rhythm the harmonies which have been developed and perpetuated in the colder land areas of Europe." To Sonny, "This combination of cultures has endowed jazz with a freedom which does not exist in any other music. It is therefore superfluous to speculate on the future direction of Jazz. Jazz will evolve as mankind evolves. … Jazz, as men, has no limits, no boundaries save those it would inflict upon itself."

Sonny felt that jazz had to shift from the jazz club to the concert hall and that the "cigarette-smoking, whisky-drinking jazz great must be replaced by the clean-living, healthy, socially-aware jazz great. This transition is not so difficult as it may seem and in many respects is already in manifestation," Sonny wrote. "I hope to further the projection of this new image."

Sonny got more of a push to come down from the Bridge that June, when Charles Mingus and Max Roach, who cofounded Debut Records together, came to visit him on Grand Street. Mingus was taken aback by Sonny's chiseled visage. But the change was more than skin deep. Sonny even gave Mingus a copy of H. Spencer Lewis's *Mansions of the Soul*. "Yes you have changed, Sonny, and I'm sure you realize I love that change," Mingus wrote. "It is rather quietly screaming at the top of your voice, muscles, and quiet attitude." That month, Mingus went to London to film *All Night Long* (1962), where he encountered a racist atmosphere as soon as he got off the plane, and he wrote Sonny a six-page single-spaced letter on June 20 after several sleepless nights demanding his return to the scene.



Excerpted from SAXOPHONE COLOSSUS: *The Life and Music of Sonny Rollins* by Aidan Levy. Copyright © 2022. Available from Hachette Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc

Mingus hadn't written anyone in years, and what came out of the typewriter was a torrent of emotion. It could be expressed only in writing, Mingus wrote, in order to keep his ego out of it and to grapple with his "*many* more than *two selves* that I have rather hesitantly learned to live with, as perhaps you have done obviously with yourself."

Mingus could follow Sonny and seek salvation through the Sisyphean pursuit of study Sonny seemed to favor, he wrote, but "I'd much rather you'd save me immediately, and Max, with your saxophone. I'd like to discuss some of this on the bandstand with you. I haven't cared and have cared too much also. But since I've seen you with Max I have been born again."

Mingus' theory was that Sonny's physical transformation was motivated by more than fitness for its own sake. "I think that aside from your faith you don't want anybody messing with you," he wrote. "I know the time Jesus got the whip out on the dealers in his temple. He was a pretty strong fellow in many ways that you're not, but I don't think he could press no 215 pounds."

To Mingus, salvation could not be found in the self without being found in the community. "I'm still old-fashioned in the belief that part of finding God is finding yourself in relation to man and with man as your brother," Mingus wrote. Together they had lived through hell, and if Sonny had found a little piece of heaven, Mingus hoped they could live through that together as well.

> *It is a further belief that if we seek in our music together, somewhat like the olden days when people played for beauty other than money, there we will find and give to the others and ourselves. But if we have found the sound of God itself and keep it to ourselves, there are those who must seek without you or the finder who pleases himself only with the sound of the Lord pouring from his horn. We must seek another and another so that all with ears can have the voice of God so needed. If you have this voice take it from your locked doors. Open your case. We will hear you as you hold your horn to let Him speak.*
>
> *Your friend,*
> *Chazz*

Max, Mingus, and Sonny never did form that trio, but soon thereafter, Sonny came down from Sinai. ***JT***

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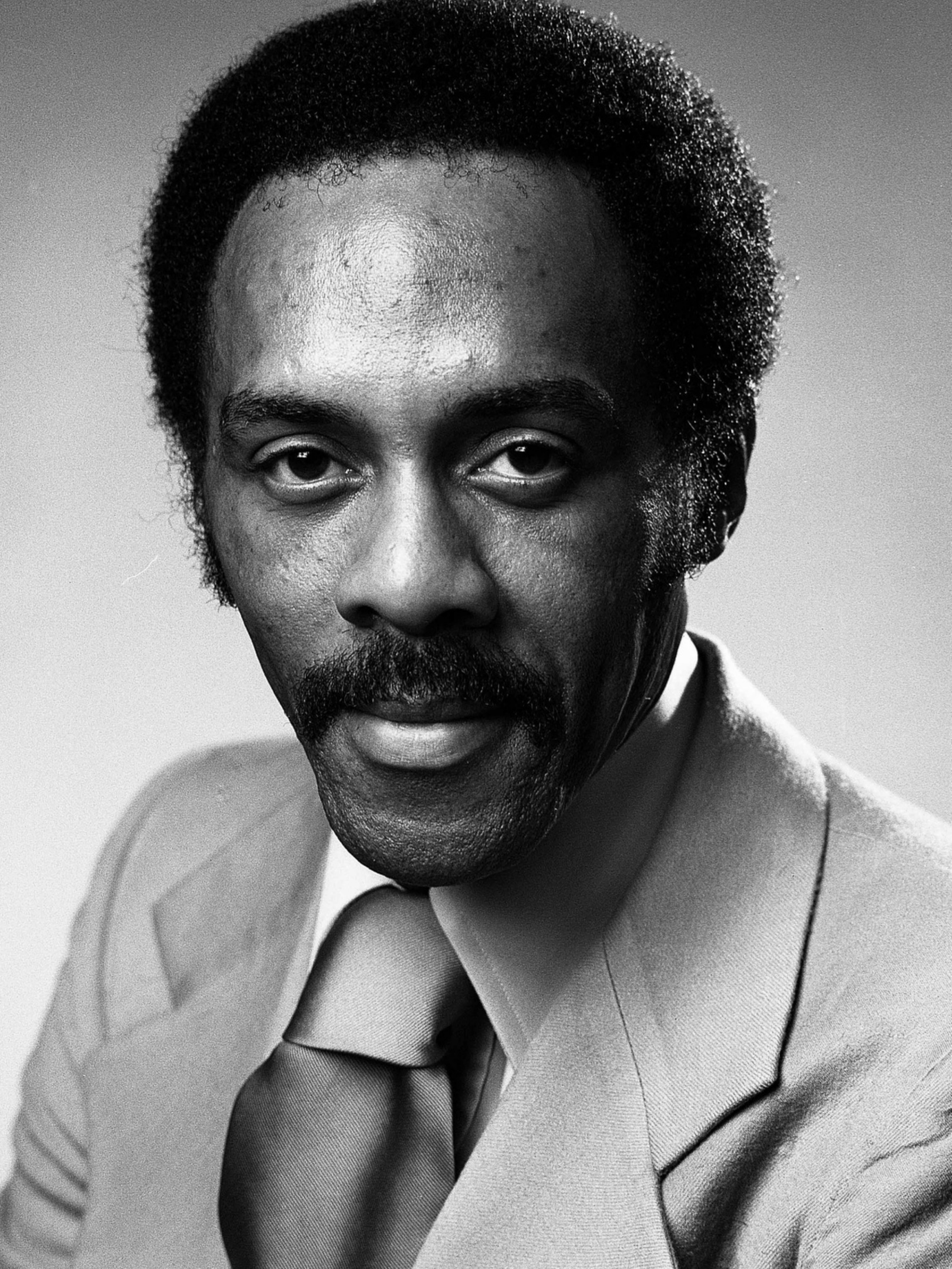


Executive Honor

Gifted producer and A&R man DR. GEORGE BUTLER coaxed Miles Davis back into the spotlight, played a key role in the ascent of Wynton Marsalis, and spurred on the young lions of the 1980s and '90s. Then he disappeared from the business. What happened?

By John Murph

Elegant. Exemplary. Erudite. Enigmatic.

Those four words best describe the late Dr. George Butler, a seminal figure in the rise of the 1980s and '90s "young lions" movement in jazz. As an executive producer and A&R vice president for jazz and progressive music at Columbia Records, he shepherded the early careers of stars such as Wynton Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, and Harry Connick Jr.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of one of Butler's greatest coups: Wynton Marsalis' eponymous debut album. Back in 1982, it was a bold if risky statement for a major label to sponsor a 21-year-old trumpeter and composer who bucked the prevailing jazz-funk fusion trend in favor of blistering acoustic postbop. But the gambit paid off tremendously, catapulting Marsalis into superstardom and gaining him pop-culture name recognition on a par with Prince, Michael Jackson, and Madonna.

The immense influence of Wynton's debut and subsequent albums paved the way for Butler to sign a legion of other young jazz artists to Columbia, including Joey DeFrancesco, Monte Croft, Nnenna Freelon, Rachel Z, Marlon Jordan, Kent Jordan, Ryan Kisor, Jane Ira Bloom, and Travis Shook. Soon after, other major labels like Warner Bros. and Atlantic followed suit, while iconic jazz imprints such as Blue Note and Verve revitalized themselves by signing more young lions.

Butler had helped change the course of jazz. But then, after retiring from Columbia in the mid-'90s, he seemed to vanish from the world. By the time he died in 2008, his achievements had been reduced to a footnote in comparison to other executives like Bruce Lundvall and Tommy LiPuma. Even today, he remains embarrassingly unsung.

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard recorded for Columbia beginning in the mid-'80s (co-leading ensembles with alto saxophonist Donald Harrison) and throughout the '90s (as both a rising solo artist and acclaimed scorer for Spike Lee's films). He remembers Butler as "a square peg trying to fit in a round hole.

"[Butler] was a unicorn," Blanchard says. "His personality was not something that fit the jazz mold. He wasn't a dude who hung out at the clubs. He did his job, then went home. There was no need for him to sit around with the jazz police to validate his job. So, consequently, you don't have stories about George being at the Village Vanguard all night long."

Jazz record industry veteran Al Pryor worked closely with Butler at Columbia in the '90s and cites him as a mentor, noting that he was one of the few Black jazz executives for a major label. He argues that Butler's legacy is underacknowledged because he consciously rose above the muck of the cutthroat music business. "I know that this is pure speculation on my part, but sometimes he wasn't taken seriously because he was always polite," Pryor says. "He just wouldn't get down in the gutter the way other people would do in the record industry."

BLACK ELEGANCE

Ask people who collaborated with Butler what they remember about him, and one thing they'll often mention first is his sartorial flair. Six feet two inches tall and debonair with an athletic body, Butler knew how to clean up. He had a penchant for wearing expensive cologne, well-tailored suits, and designer shoes with no socks à la Harlem Renaissance writer R. Bruce Nugent. And his mannerisms were just as posh as his threads.

"He was an impeccable dresser. That had an impact on both me and Wynton," Branford Marsalis says. "Just to see a brother in an executive position, dressing that sharply and with confidence."

"He was so immaculate in the way that he carried himself and in the way that he spoke," Harry Connick Jr. says. "I remember having a trench coat on and I had it buckled. He said, 'Don't buckle it. Just tie it once through in a knot.' I said, 'Why?' and he said, 'Because that's not how you're supposed to wear it.' He always looked like he was coming out of the pages of *GQ*."

Butler's natty taste carried over into the way many of his artists dressed during performances and photo shoots. Sandra Trim-DaCosta, who worked with Butler at Columbia as the director of artist development and marketing, says that his style had an immense influence on the look of jazz's young lions.

"George played a role in helping the guys get their looks together," Trim-Da Costa says. "He worked closely with them in terms of imaging and putting together the fashion piece for the album covers … so that they would be taken seriously as jazz musicians in the industry."

ARRIVAL AT COLUMBIA

Butler joined Columbia's staff in 1978, after establishing a trailblazing career at Blue Note Records, where he'd been the label's president (the only Black person ever to have that job) for six years. Under his leadership, Blue Note released numerous jazz-funk and fusion gems, signing a litany of crossover stars that included flutist Bobbi Humphrey, saxophonist Ronnie Laws, organist Ronnie Foster, violinist Noel Pointer, and guitarist Earl Klugh. It was during Butler's tenure at Blue Note that the Mizell Brothers arguably defined the sound of that era with top-selling (and still highly regarded) LPs by Humphrey and trumpeter Donald Byrd.

It's also important to note that when Butler signed Klugh to Blue Note, he arranged for Dave Grusin and Larry Rosen to produce the guitarist's 1976 eponymous debut. The album became a momentous success—and set the stage for Grusin and Rosen to formalize their production team and eventually start their own label, GRP.

"George had a few home runs at Blue Note

DON HUNSTEIN © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Butler's people (from left): Wynton Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, and Harry Connick Jr.

before he left," says veteran producer and music historian Michael Cuscuna. "But because the label at the time was in such huge financial turmoil, I don't think he saw much more of a future there."

Butler's arrival at Columbia occurred around the time the record industry was hitting rock bottom. By the summer of 1979, there were reports of slumping sales, massive returns of unsold records by retail outlets, and a rise in blank cassette tape sales as listeners were increasingly making their own recordings of LPs and radio shows. An August 1979 *New York Times* article reported that after CBS Records—Columbia's parent company—laid off 52 people due to financial woes during its first quarter of that year, it triggered staff reductions by nearly all the other major labels.

"Columbia Records at that time was absolutely the largest record company in America," Cuscuna says. "In terms of promotion and A&R, [it] was the Rolls-Royce of the record industry."

Bruce Lundvall was still head of the jazz department when Butler came onboard. He'd previously signed Dexter Gordon to the label after helping orchestrate the tenor titan's historic return to the U.S. from Europe, sowing seeds for what would later become an acoustic postbop renaissance. Lundvall had also signed alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe, the Heath Brothers, and trumpeters Woody Shaw and Freddie Hubbard. Cuscuna says that during the time Butler and Lundvall were a team (before the latter left Columbia in 1982 to spearhead Elektra Records' jazz subsidiary label Musician), Butler didn't deal with much of the mighty jazz roster that was already in place at Columbia. But there was one major exception.

Miles Davis had withdrawn from the music industry in the mid-'70s. Butler was determined to get him out of retirement. He would visit Miles nearly every weekday at his apartment on New York's Upper West Side, talk with him, and listen to the little motifs Davis was tinkering with on a broken piano.

Pryor, who says that Butler had perfect pitch and near-total recall of music, remembers the executive telling him how he understood what Miles was aiming for in these musical ideas. "Miles would play things on a piano that had missing keys," he says. "But George could still hear the music correctly in his head by simply watching Miles' fingering on the instrument."

The broken piano didn't stick around long once Butler started visiting. For Miles' birthday, Butler convinced Lundvall and Columbia to purchase him a $100,000 Steinway.

Cuscuna recalls: "George told me, 'The core basis of my relationship with Miles is clothes. We would get on the phone and talk about clothes for an hour.' That was his door in." Butler proceeded to work with Miles on his 1981 comeback album *The Man with the Horn*.

EXEMPLARY A&R

After reigniting Miles' career, Butler's next significant win at Columbia was with Wynton Marsalis, who had instigated a bidding war among the labels because of his blistering virtuosity with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers and Herbie Hancock's V.S.O.P. group.

There's some disagreement as to who actually signed Marsalis. According to Dan Ouellette's book *Playing by Ear*, it was Lundvall, while Wynton himself says that it was Butler. "George was the first one to get the ball rolling," Cuscuna explains. "Then he got distracted with other things, so Bruce had to step in to help close that deal."

Once Marsalis joined the label, Butler nudged the trumpeter to go in a direction similar to that of GRP's trumpet star Tom Browne, maker of jazz-funk classics like 1981's "Thighs High (Grip Your Hips and Move)." Wynton, however, balked.

"I'd played in funk bands," Marsalis says, "so it wasn't that I didn't like funk music. I like funk. But jazz-funk was always *kinda funky*. There's a big difference between something like Parliament-Funkadelic and Ramsey Lewis. I was really strong-minded; I'd just come from the South. I didn't know all the politics about the music industry. I just knew that I wanted to play jazz and do something that would make my daddy proud. That was more important to me."

Butler already had someone in mind to produce Marsalis' debut, but the New Orleans-bred trumpeter insisted on getting Hancock to produce it. And it was Hancock who encouraged Butler to allow Marsalis to make the album of his choice.

Trim-DaCosta says that Butler was a "visionary" who could envision artists' full

WYNTON: MICHAEL LIEWELLYN © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT; BRANFORD: KAREN KUEHN © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT; CONNICK: HANS NELEMAN ©

potential, make them more commercially viable, and set them apart from the pack. "When Wynton performed at the [1984] Grammy Awards show, he played jazz and classical. That was a unique concept that George came up with," she says. "It was about showing his true virtuosity. That was the beginning of people paying more attention to Wynton as a serious musician. George always saw the future of the jazz talent, which was beyond what they could even envision for themselves."

"[George] is the reason I played classical music," Marsalis confirms. "He heard a recording of me playing a Vivaldi trumpet concerto. He suggested that I make a classical album. George was always a tremendous advocate for me. It makes me think about it even more in light of how contentious our relationship could be. I never disrespected him; let me make this clear. That's because of my upbringing. We could disagree. But when it came to him advocating for me, he *advocated* for me."

And yet, for all Butler's strong advocacy of Marsalis, the trumpeter claims that Butler wasn't the biggest fan of his jazz music. "If I have to be honest, George really didn't like a lot of the music that I recorded, but he supported it. Philosophically, we were not on the same page at all. But George always treated me with love."

Most artists who worked with Butler, however, claim that he was incredibly supportive of artists making their own choices. "George would pretty much let you make any kind of record that you wanted to make," Branford Marsalis says. "If you wanted to make a jazz record, he'll let you do that. If you wanted to make a jazz R&B record, he'll let you do that. I always appreciated that."

Butler's next big move at Columbia was signing Harry Connick Jr. By then, he'd begun mining New Orleans for young jazz talent: Wynton's brother Branford, the Jordan brothers, Blanchard, Harrison. He'd also cultivated a relationship with pianist and educator Ellis Marsalis, who recommended Connick. In 1983, the piano prodigy won a competition in Kansas City hosted by the National Association of Jazz Educators. He was only 15. That's when he first met Butler. "He said, 'I've heard about you. When you get to New York, give me a call,'" Connick remembers. "That was the most exciting thing anyone had ever said to me then."

> "George always saw the future of the jazz talent, which was beyond what they could even envision for themselves."
> —Sandra Trim-DaCosta

When he reached 18, Connick moved to New York and called Butler's office every day for about six months. He would go to the Columbia Records building and sit in the lobby, watching people go in and out. "He seemed to never have time for me," Connick says. "Then one day he said, 'Come on in. How would you like to be a part of the Columbia Records family?' I almost completely lost it."

Connick says that Butler provided some guidance for his 1987 Columbia debut. He knew that Connick was also a crooner but insisted that he not sing on the album in order to establish him first as a commanding jazz pianist. (He also wanted Connick to drop the "Jr.," arguing that he had too many names for consumers to remember; Harry insisted on keeping it.) For 1988's follow-up *20*, Butler arranged guest appearances from singer Carmen McCrae, bassist Bob Hurst, and fellow New Orleans pianist/singer Dr. John—all of Connick's choosing. That album highlighted his fetching vocals, which transformed him into a breakout jazz star with pop appeal. *20* climbed to No. 6 on *Billboard*'s jazz charts and went platinum.

From there, Butler allowed Connick to map out his own trajectory to fame. "The great thing about George was that he stayed out of the way. He let me do my thing, and made sure that the record got made," Connick says. "That's what a great A&R person is supposed to do."

ERUDITION

Butler's jazz advocacy extended into higher education, particularly Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Butler himself was an HBCU product, having

More of Butler's people (from left): Nnenna Freelon, Joey DeFrancesco, and Terence Blanchard

FREELON: KIP MEYER © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT; DEFRANCESCO: ELLISON © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT; BLANCHARD: WARREN MANTOOTH JR. © SONY

earned his bachelor's degree in music from Howard University; he continued his studies at Columbia University, where he earned a master's degree in music education.

According to Pryor, Butler was still at Columbia in the early '60s, aiming for a doctorate, when his doctoral advisor introduced him to Mike Stewart from United Artists Records. Leaping at the chance to work at that label as a record producer, he switched career trajectories. While at UA he produced easy-listening LPs by the likes of Ferrante & Teicher and Shirley Bassey. In the early '70s, he moved over to Blue Note, which was then distributed by United Artists. (He began using the "Dr." salutation after receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of North Carolina.)

Paula Potts, a close confidante to Butler, explains that he understood the power of education, especially for the upward financial mobility of Black people. "Education meant *everything* to him," she says. "He tried to work with people who were educated, and he encouraged them to become educators while also being artists."

As acting director of the Triangle Association of Colleges when Butler was at Blue Note, Potts would work with him to bring jazz musicians to HBCUs. "A lot of that stuff was way out of our budget, but George could make it happen because he had the power of the pen," she remembers. "He could get the big company executive to do things that he wanted them to do. It was really a pipe dream to bring Ramsey Lewis, Noel Pointer, and all those cats to these underfunded little colleges. George cared enough about the smaller HBCUs that I was working for to entertain the idea of bringing big jazz acts so that the students could enjoy those opportunities."

Butler's collaboration with HBCUs continued at Columbia Records. Wynton Marsalis also praises him in this regard: "He was an advocate for the music in non-musical environments. Work in a Black university and try to get something done; you're going to struggle. With George being in jazz, it was always uphill because Black people didn't support the music. All through the '80s, my whole thing was harping on 'Let's get on Black radio.' And somehow we were doing that, even though it was a hard environment to be in. George made significant inroads for jazz on that front."

Jane Ira Bloom in 1987

DEAN CHAMBERLAIN © SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

A CHAMPION FOR WOMEN

Even though the young lions of the '80s and '90s were very much a boy's club, especially on the instrumental side, Butler recognized the talents of women musicians. At Blue Note, he'd signed Bobbi Humphrey and pianist Barbara Carroll; at Columbia, he brought soprano saxophonist/flutist Hilary Schmidt, violinist Sonya Robinson, soprano/alto saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom, singer Nnenna Freelon, and pianists Aziza Mustafa Zadeh and Rachel Z onboard.

Bloom, who'd already released several albums before signing with Columbia, remembers Butler as being a "class act" and regards him as "one of the last great A&R men in jazz. ... The tone of our conversations was always about music. George was very curious about the fact that I was using live electronics from the perspective of a jazz improviser."

When it came time to record her 1987 Columbia debut **Modern Drama**, Bloom was one of the label's few new jazz signees allowed to manage their own budget as a producer. She was also allowed to record with pianist Fred Hersch, bassist Ratzo Harris, drummer Tom Rainey, and vibraphonist David Friedman—musicians with whom she'd already developed a rapport.

"[Butler] recognized me as a woman playing an instrument largely associated with men," Bloom recalls. "He heard something special in my music, and he wasn't afraid to get behind it."

Rachel Z recalls a similar experience when she signed with the label for her 1993 debut **Trust the Universe**. Butler "knew that it would be a little hard for me being a woman in jazz," she says. "But we really never spoke about that. He just acted on respecting me as a musician. In that way, he nurtured my talent. He set my expectations high and got me to believe in myself. He was always positioning me to the best of his abilities for me to perform in really high places."

THE ENIGMA

But for all of Butler's ubiquity on the jazz and educational scenes, he was inscrutable about his private life. Many colleagues with whom he worked for years claim they never knew that he was married or had a daughter, Bethany Butler. That includes Potts, who accompanied Butler to many professional functions. "I didn't ask personal questions," she says. "I instinctively knew that he didn't want to answer personal questions. I think George had secrets that he carried to his grave.

Butler was born on September 2, 1931, in Charlotte, North Carolina. Both of his parents were college graduates. His mother

> "George told me, 'The core basis of my relationship with Miles is clothes. We would get on the phone and talk about clothes for an hour.'"
>
> —Michael Cuscuna

Butler with Miles Davis, his fellow enthusiast in matters of the cloth

taught elementary school and his father played "boogie-woogie" piano, according to Butler's younger sister and only sibling, Jacqueline Hairston, who describes him as "very playful" and someone who loved to play basketball. The family lived on the west side of Charlotte, where most "hard-working black families lived." Both children took piano lessons; George focused on jazz while Jacqueline leaned toward classical music. "One of his favorite pastimes, when no one was around, was to imitate the playing style of Erroll Garner," Hairston says.

She believes that Butler kept his private life so guarded out of deep-seated impostor's syndrome. "George didn't want anyone knowing that he had fears about being a success in the big city, where he could be criticized," she says. "Plus, he had to prove to mother and dad back home that he could make a go of it because he still saw himself as this boy from small-town North Carolina, who was uncertain about his own musical prowess."

BUTLER'S EXIT

In 1987, as Columbia's young lions flourished, Sony purchased CBS Records for $2 billion in cash. Soon after, Butler became senior vice-president of jazz at Columbia/Sony. He continued making strides with the lions, as well as with more pop-leaning acts such as saxophonist Grover Washington, Jr. and Kirk Whalum.

Some say, though, that Sony's arrival was the beginning of the end for Butler's reign. "It was a very tricky time at Columbia," pianist/composer Rachel Z says. "There was a nice stable of jazz artists there. But with Sony's takeover, the bean counters started giving him more oversight than he was used to. He was holding strong for maybe two years after that takeover, I believe. When the bean counters started coming in, it just gave other people, who wanted to take over, an opportunity."

Blanchard claims that Butler shielded his jazz artists from many of the struggles he fought with upper management over promotional and marketing support. "You could see the writing on the wall. They were trying to push these other guys in," Blanchard says, alluding to Kevin Gore, who became vice president of jazz, promotion, and marketing; Steve Berkowitz, Sony Legacy vice president of A&R; and Seth Rothstein, marketing director for Legacy.

"It's like anything else—something became successful, then someone else wants to bring in their own people to take advantage of it. There were a couple of other guys who were lobbying for George's position. They were the guys who would go hang out with Don Ienner, who was Columbia Records' president at that time. It was really rough seeing some of the younger people try to undercut George through the some of the decisions they were making."

Doug Wilkins worked with Butler for nine years as CBS Records' national director of jazz marketing and promotion. "There were a lot of questions when Kevin Gore came aboard," he says. "We used to always talk about jazz as being a Black form of music. So George felt threatened when someone other than Black came in and tried to spearhead the direction of the artists."

People who worked with him sensed Butler's frustration, but because of his quiet demeanor, he hardly expressed his bitterness in public. Also, he was basically a loner. "George's final days at Columbia Records were not pretty," says Carl Griffin, who was senior VP of A&R at GRP Records throughout the '90s and mid-aughts. "He didn't have allies. They were pushing George to the sides. Kevin became the voice of jazz at Sony because he had allies. George was in a tenuous position because he didn't know how to fight that dirty fight."

"[George] was of that second generation of Black [record] executives that had a lot of scar tissue," Wynton Marsalis adds.

"Things got cloudy in the early '90s," Cuscuna recalls. "George wasn't doing much. He was at the company every day, but he wasn't as active soliciting and signing artists. Most of the jazz activity started going through Steve Berkowitz and Kevin Gore. I would ask them what George was doing and people would say, 'Oh, I do know. He has some personal issues going on. He's just not himself right now.' I don't know what that meant. But he was on a decline as an active career person."

Gore and Berkowitz were not available for interviews.

Some of Butler's "personal issues" may have been caused by the early onset of what was eventually diagnosed as Alzheimer's disease. After his mid-'90s retirement from Columbia, he tried, unsuccessfully, to start his own label. As the disease progressed, he moved to a retirement home in Hayward, California, to be near his sister. In January 2008, he went missing for 36 hours. The weather was cold and rainy; he was found near a creek bed, entangled upside down in some bushes. Four months after that incident, on April 9, Butler died at Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley, California. He was 76.

Afterward, his name nearly faded into obscurity. "He is one of the most unsung people in the jazz world," Wilkins says. "When he passed away there was not a lot of fanfare. I thought at that time that the label would have given him a bigger tribute, because he was quite the accomplished person and of the way that he conducted himself."

"I say this about all A&R guys: If you have a .500 batting average, you're phenomenal," Cuscuna adds. "George had certain home runs that weren't just home runs; they were home runs with the bases loaded and the ball went outside the stadium and into the parking lot." ***JT***

COURTESY OF GENEVIEVE STEWART

DAVE MCKEAN

THE BOUNDARY INVESTIGATOR

BILL BRUFORD looks back at a drumming life spent on the lines between genres

BY JIM FARBER

AT certain points in his long and varied career, Bill Bruford has been called a rock drummer. At others, he has been called a jazz drummer. He isn't happy about either description. "If there were a government edict that came down tomorrow that said that the words 'rock' and 'jazz' will never be permissible again, I'd be thrilled," Bruford said. "That would give drummers like me a freer hand."

Not that there *are* many drummers like him. Over the course of a 50-plus-year career, Bill Bruford has played with innovative rock bands like Yes and King Crimson, led his own experimental jazz groups—including one that operated under his own surname and another named Earthworks—and collaborated on a dizzying array of projects with players from Ralph Towner to Allan Holdsworth to Dutch pianist Michiel Borstlap. He even cut an inventive album with the Piano Circus that featured no fewer than six players on that instrument. Over the years, Bruford has created music that's dense, raucous, and electric, as well as spare, hushed, and acoustic. Through all of it, he's been celebrated for both his taste and his power. To illustrate the former: King Crimson's Robert Fripp was so impressed by the drummer's considered decision to add nothing to the band's 1974 track "Trio" that he gave Bruford a co-writing credit. "I *did* contribute something," Bruford asserted. "Silence."

Nearly five decades later, the full arc of his career has finally found a home. Bruford recently released a six-CD box set titled *Making a Song and Dance: A Complete-Career Collection* that organizes his quixotic catalog in an inventive way. He anointed the separate CDs with distinct titles to distinguish the varying functions of his work on the recordings. Discs 1 and 2 present him as "The Collaborator," evidenced by his work with Yes and King Crimson. Discs 3 and 4 capture him as "The Composing Leader," guiding Bruford and Earthworks. On Disc 5 he operates as "The Special Guest," a session man toiling for stars like Roy Harper and Al Di Meola. And on the final disc he plays "The Improviser," for works he created spontaneously with players running the gamut from keyboardist Patrick Moraz to guitarist David Torn. Together, the 70 tracks underscore Bruford's deep aversion to genre. "I'm a fence sitter," he said, "a boundary investigator."

Even so, clues to a hierarchy among his loves can be found in the dining room of his home in the Southeast of England. On one wall sits a framed transcription of Tony Williams' 32-bar solo from Miles Davis' "Seven Steps to Heaven." "It's a little masterpiece," he said. "In a way, it's quite simple. But if you look at how each phrase follows the next, it's a logical work of art."

Likewise, in conversation Bruford speaks with a logic and intention that betray his connection to academia. He holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Surrey and in 2018 he published the scholarly tome *Uncharted: Creativity and the Expert Drummer*. Thirteen years ago, at age 59, he retired from performing, so it's left to the new box to maintain his legacy. Speaking by Zoom from his home, Bruford talked about a career that, he says, has found him forever "in search of difference."

JT: What drummers served as role models for you?

BILL BRUFORD: Max Roach would be number one. Also, Art Blakey was fantastically strong for me. Tony Williams came a bit later, and then Joe Morello, because his work was effortless and economical with incredible technical ability. And he brought a drum solo into the British Top 10 with "Take Five"! How could you not fall in love with that? I was always okay with his odd time signatures. I felt I could be a bit different from other drummers if I also used different time signatures, so I was always advocating that we take a note out or add a note to the bar line.

I know you were also affected by Ginger Baker's drumming. When did you discover it?

At 14, I watched him with the Graham Bond Organization with John McLaughlin on guitar and Dick Heckstall-Smith on sax. To see that at 14, you're imprinted for life! I can never get away from the Graham Bond Organization album *The Sound of '65*.

When you were in Yes, you got to open for Baker's band Cream on their farewell tour. Did you meet him?
I didn't dare say hello. He was a very scary man. So was Tony Williams. Never meet your idols! [*Laughs*]

Logically, your box set opens with several Yes tracks, including "Heart of the Sunrise" from 1971. In your liner notes you write that Yes finally found its sound with that song. But that was on the band's fourth album! What about "Sunrise" changed things?
Until then, we'd been essentially a covers group, extending the work of other people while putting in codicils and codas. Or we were doing that a bit ham-fistedly on our own work. But "Heart of the Sunrise" was fresh and original. It had all the makings of what we wanted to do in seven to 10 minutes. That was the template from which grew [the next Yes album, 1972's] *Close to the Edge*. I absolutely loved that album!

But you quit Yes the minute the album was complete. Why?
Being young and romantic and arrogant—a deadly combination—I felt that, having only played with four or five people in my whole life, it was time to stretch my wings.

What was the reaction of the other members to that?
The only guy who was horrible was the manager. [Singer] Jon Anderson gave me his blessing even though it hurt him the most.

You left Yes to join King Crimson at a time when Robert Fripp was wholly remaking the band. The radical sound you all came up with, starting with *Larks' Tongues in Aspic* in 1973, bore little relation to the style of the group's previous incarnations. How did you devise that sound?
I'm not sure there was any conscious formulation going on. It was just the product of what comes out when you lock five quite strong-headed people from disparate backgrounds in a room and hope that they make an album before they kill each other. Miles [Davis] did a similar thing. He would just put people in a room and hope they'd get on. That can work but it can also hurt people. Luckily, I'm reasonably robust in that area.

The music you created with Crimson relied heavily on improvisation. Was that a particularly attractive aspect coming after the very structured music of Yes?
It was *very* attractive, but it was forced on us in a way because we wrote very little material and because we knew we could improvise. When you gave us a stage and said, "Play something new —start a piece of music, develop it, give it shape and then conclude it effectively on your own"—we could all do that.

That era of Crimson seemed to have something in common with Mahavishnu Orchestra, which had formed the year before. Both bands featured an electric violin and ultraviolent guitar work. Did Mahavishnu present a template for you?
It was completely unconscious but we happened to sound pretty close. I don't know why Robert selected a violinist for the other voice. He'd had two saxophone players before that. But he decided it would be a violin and two Mellotrons, which made the internal intonation in the group pretty shocking. We were quite good at shocking people!

You mentioned Tony Williams earlier. Was his band Lifetime, and other fusion groups of that formative era, important to Crimson's sound?
They made a *huge* impression. We played on the same bill as Miles in that era. And I loved early Weather Report. Me and [Crimson singer/bassist] John Wetton listened to Herbie Hancock's *Crossings* and *Sextant*. Some people don't get that music. I remember we were opening for John McLaughlin with Yes. I took [Yes keyboardist] Rick Wakeman out into the auditorium to hear it and said, "There's really something going on here. What do you think?" He couldn't hear it at all.

On *Larks' Tongues* you worked for the first time with another drummer, Jamie Muir. What was that dynamic like?
Jamie was a bit older and more experienced. He gave me some powerful music lessons, for sure. But he was tough! He would say, "What are you playing *that* for?" I was still sufficiently young and I felt that music existed to serve me. I didn't realize it's the other way around. I was still showing everybody my very fast patterns or something infantile like that.

Jamie left the band shortly after *Larks'*. Why didn't he fit?
Jamie had too many colors. He was like a mad painter with instruments everywhere and he wanted everything microphoned and monitored. That was not electronically possible back then. Also, rock music was too narrow to accept someone that broad. You have to do things a certain way with that music.

Speaking of "doing things a certain way," Fripp has a reputation for being a hard taskmaster. Did you find him to be so?
He was an unusual man with a powerful mind and an outrageous sense of humor. But he didn't come to the rehearsals with huge charts that we were told to play. He would sketch out a ballpark plan on the back of a cigarette pack and then it was up to us, which I thought was fair and fine. At the same time, it was one of those bands where you didn't know if it would be there at breakfast the next day. There was no security of tenure in King Crimson.

Indeed, Fripp broke up the group three albums in, right after releasing *Red* [1974], which many fans thought was that band's best. Do you agree that *Red* was a peak?

"Once you've been on a stage with a couple of guys and looked into the whites of the audience members' eyes and tried to perform something they think is courageous or intelligent or funny and then received applause for it, you've bonded—like warriors."

A big box of Bruford: the cover of *Making a Song and Dance*

I do. But it was a fairly torturous album to make. Robert decided to withhold any opinion on what was going down on tape, so it was effectively left to John and myself to make editorial decisions on what we should keep and what we shouldn't.

Do you know *why* Fripp killed that band?
I didn't spend a lot of time divining Robert's reasons for any of this. But as a player, I was disappointed. I was also terrified to be out of work.

You soon formed another group: the fusion band U.K., with Wetton, guitarist Allan Holdsworth, and violinist Eddie Jobson. But it seemed there were two competing sensibilities in that band—the more adventurous side with you and Allan, and the more conventional one with John and Eddie. Did that make it difficult to balance the music?
The fault line was there from the get-go, so I knew that this would likely be an unstable ship. But, I thought, if we get one good album out of it, that's worth almost anything. As it turned out, there wasn't a second album [with the original lineup] because Eddie and John wanted to go on to become hugely famous with radio-friendly rock and I didn't want to become famous or play radio-friendly rock.

In fact, you moved further into jazz at that point, and then wholly into it with Earthworks. Was that your way of separating yourself from the prog-rock movement you'd been so closely associated with before?
It was absolutely a way of doing that. But the big difference with Earthworks was that there was no singer. If I was forced to distinguish between types of music, one is where musicians support singers and the other is where they're not doing that. I love singers but I didn't want to spend my whole life with one on stage. Happily, I managed to edge away at that point and play instrumental music, which I thought was lovely.

Earthworks changed its approach radically over time, from a style oriented around early electronic drums to a more acoustic atmosphere. Was that evolution or will?
At the beginning, it was consciously focused on "I've got a new electronic drum kit!," which made the band sound different. But eventually that caused all kinds of problems because of the amount of equipment necessary to cart around. These days, hybrid drum kits are a lot easier to manage. At some point with Earthworks, I came under the spell of Joshua Redman, who had a really ballsy and muscular acoustic sound. I thought, "Ah, we should refigure as acoustic—but *loud* acoustic."

The box set describes four different roles for you over your career. Is there a hierarchy among those roles for you?
I don't think there is from a listener's point of view. But from a performer's point of view, I'm less good at being a studio musician. A lot of musicians play a whole lot better on someone else's gig. I feel constrained by it. Good studio musicians, like Steve Gadd, are fabulous at producing the right thing for the right person.

My favorite role for you is as "The Improviser."
Me too! But to come on a stage without any prepared music in front of 2,000 or 3,000 people who are ready for some entertainment requires some serious chutzpah! That's why I included on the set things like "The Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians" with Michiel Borstlap, who also did some work with Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. That's seven unedited minutes of "I'll play something, now you play something." On that recording, we got what seemed to me something like a *Close to the Edge* quality, something which would have taken weeks for somebody to create and write.

In your career, you've kept returning to work with keyboardists: Borstlap, Patrick Moraz, the Piano Circus. Why did that become a motif?
It's interesting, isn't it? Keyboards are percussion instruments, of course. Also, the duo environment is so easy. There's no harmonic clash. And the economics are great. You can rent a drum kit and someone's provided a Bösendorfer and you can just play!

You stopped playing over a decade ago. Do you miss it?
I miss the society of musicians. Once you've been on a stage with a couple of guys and looked into the whites of the audience members' eyes and tried to perform something they think is courageous or intelligent or funny and then received applause for it, you've bonded—like warriors. What I *don't* miss is the difficulty of being a musician these days, where you're in a race for a pair of ears to listen. The amount of time necessary to do that for a gentleman of my age is, well … I miss the drums but I don't miss the context or the circumstances under which I would have to play them in public.

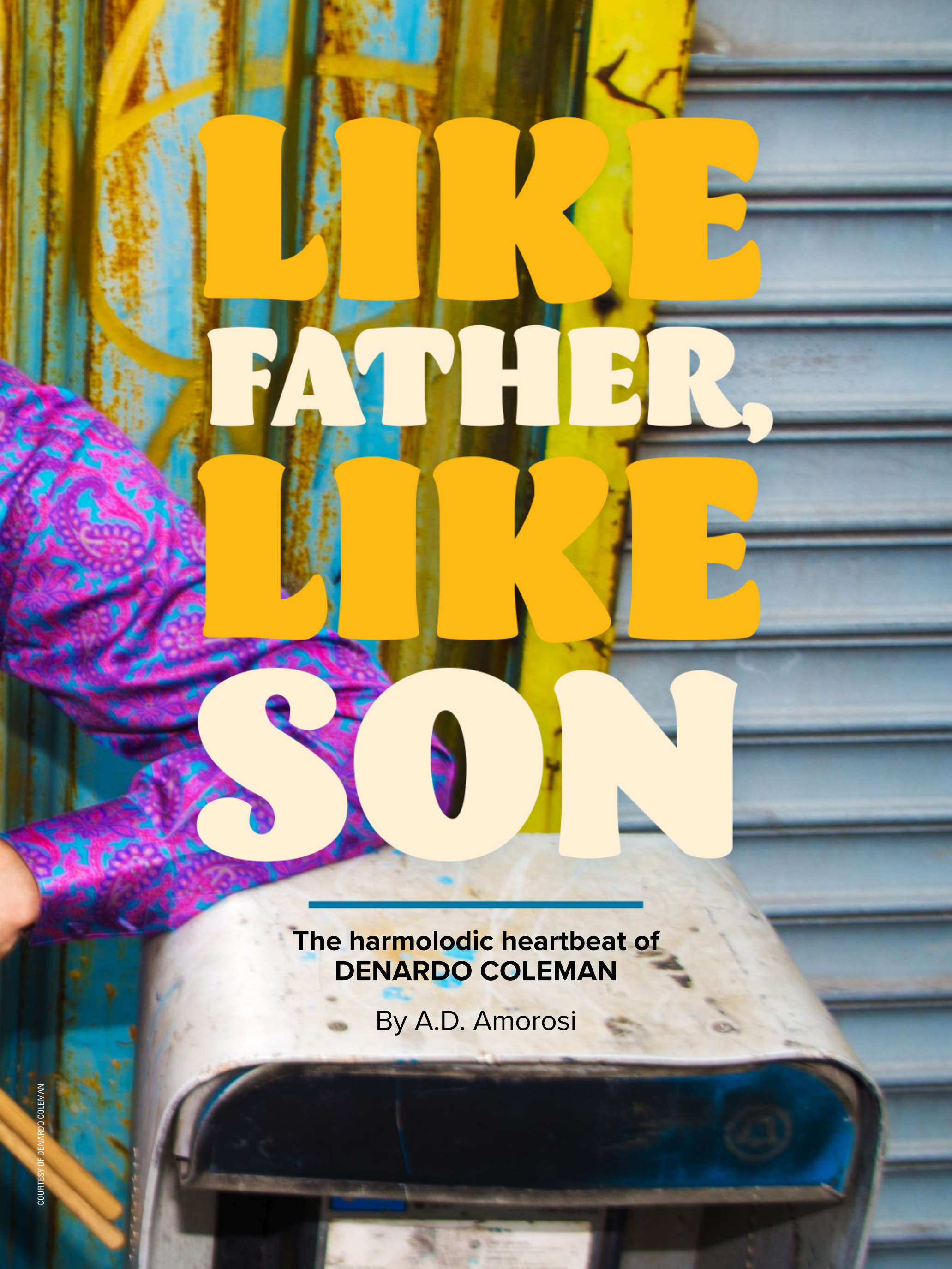
At the same time, you've been busier than ever chronicling your career. Two years ago, you released a 20-CD compilation of Earthworks recordings and now you have this box set. It seems that you're eager to cement a legacy.
I must be an egomaniac for wanting this! But it's a good piece of fortune to have lived long enough to generate music over 50 years and then wrap it up with a pink bow and a ribbon at the end. This is me saying, "That was my best shot. Now what's yours?" ***JT***

A grown-up Denardo sometime in the NYNEX pay-phone era

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

The harmolodic heartbeat of DENARDO COLEMAN

By A.D. Amorosi



COURTESY OF DENARDO COLEMAN

Coleman behind the kit (L) and getting the point from Jamaaladeen Tacuma (R) at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's May 2022 *Shape of Jazz to Come* concert

Before we enter the current world of drummer, producer, and curator Denardo Coleman, a funny story from the past.

In 1996, the year after the Coleman family had established the Harmolodic record label through Verve/PolyGram, Denardo's father, saxophonist/composer Ornette Coleman, dropped two new albums, *Sound Museum: Three Women* and *Sound Museum: Hidden Man*, while his mother, spoken-word artist Jayne Cortez, released *Taking the Blues Back Home*. At the same time, Harmolodic put out several of the saxophonist's earlier works once solely offered through the indie Artists House, including 1978's *Body Meta* with Ornette's electric band Prime Time and *Soapsuds, Soapsuds*, recorded in 1977 with bassist and longtime friend Charlie Haden. Denardo helped work through the new label's minutiae, as well as dealing with all of its press.

Assigned to interview Denardo about the rhythmic role he'd played in many of his father's ensembles since childhood, as well as discussing his new entrepreneurial efforts, this writer phoned Harmolodic's Harlem office, only to get a man on the line who was obviously disguising his voice, insisting that "no one's home" and that he was "the janitor."

After a minute, sensing I was being pranked, I asked the obvious question: "Is this Ornette Coleman?"

The saxophonist laughed and said, "Hang on. I'll go get my son. He's expecting you."

Given Ornette's history—the way he set the avant garde on its heels with 1959's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, his pioneering work in the land of the free, his creation of the harmolodic theory of music (which, among other things, de-emphasizes the concept of keys or tonal centers)—it can be easy to conclude that he was never anything but serious. But that's not true at all. Reminded of this story now, the 66-year-old Denardo says, "My father was a funny man."

This year, that easy humor, along with Ornette's many other compelling traits, has been celebrated with vinyl box sets of both his first recordings for Lester Koenig's Contemporary label in the late '50s (*Genesis of Genius: The Contemporary Albums*) and his Blue Note years from 1966 to 1968 (*Round Trip*). Other vintage Ornette sessions are in the process of being compiled by Denardo with help from archivist/producer Michael Cuscuna. And soon there will be another, newly recorded multi-package to join them in tribute to the jazz revolutionary who passed in 2015 at the age of 85: *Ornette Coleman: The Shape of Jazz to Come*.

Produced and curated by Denardo (who also played drums) and cut live in May 2022 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), this re-envisioning of his dad's '59 classic involved the Bang on a Can Orchestra, Ornette collaborators such as guitarist James "Blood" Ulmer and bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma, fans like pianist Jason Moran, a handful of young composers (Nick Dunston, Craig Harris, Nicole Mitchell, Carman Moore, David Sanford, Pamela Z), and conductor Awadagin Pratt. "There were a lot of different energies in that room," Denardo says of the BAM jam and its rehearsals, all captured by multiple cameras for documentary purposes.

The concert began as a joint commission of BAM and the Bang on a Can group. "We couldn't do that which was originally planned, the *Skies of America* celebration, as that was just too big," Denardo says, referring to his father's 1972 orchestral work, originally performed and recorded by the London Symphony. "I came up with the idea of revisiting his 1959 album's six songs and approaching

COURTESY OF DENARDO COLEMAN

six different composers to make new arrangements—really new compositions by the time each was finished—inspired by Ornette, with the orchestra and hand-picked musicians I called Ornette Expressions all playing together. And it was unbelievable."

Noting that the name "Ornette Expressions" allows for the inclusion of all of the saxophonist's many projects, Denardo says that he intends to keep the repertory group going, with interchangeable players and settings: "I'm getting out and going around the world finding younger musicians who are harmolodically oriented, such as [trumpeter] Wallace Roney Jr. and [multi-reedist] Lee Odom." Both took part in the BAM show.

"Lee had the toughest job that night, playing the sax," Denardo acknowledges. "But she and I have been playing together a while now, learning and studying together. Wallace and I played together too. That band—Lee, Wallace, Jamaaladeen—we rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed like Ornette did, over and over with his people, because it's never just about learning the melodies or rhythms. You have to get inside the properties of the sound so that you can really tell stories in the moment. That takes a lot of exploration."

As Denardo explores his own history, it causes him to say something surprising. "I can't say that I'm interested in drumming, so to speak. Or ever was. But I was interested in what the drummers who played with my father—Billy Higgins, Ed Blackwell, Charles Moffett—were doing. The three of them are in my head, even now they're ringing through me as I'm playing. This is true."

In the first of many basketball analogies we share, Denardo refers to Higgins in particular as occupying the point-guard position in Ornette's quartet. "When you have a really good point guard, he can control the whole flow of the game. He doesn't have to score a lot, but he's five steps ahead of whatever's happening on the floor. It's invisible, though, totally not tangible. The point guard is setting other people up to get to their sweet spot. That's Billy. He didn't have to slam dunk. He created an environment where things could flow in particular ways. Getting your teammates into a certain rhythm."

Denardo asked for his own drum kit when he was six. Not long after, he was jamming with his dad in the garage of their Los Angeles home. At 10, he was playing with Ornette in the recording studio (on the same 1966 album, *The Empty Foxhole*, where the elder Coleman fixed his untrained eye on violin and trumpet). And, perhaps not coincidentally, he actually played point guard on his high school's basketball team. "We were good, New York private-school good," he laughs. "I had the whole field in my

"That's what I'm talking about—being the harmolodic point guard. I'm organizing the flow."

COURTESY OF DENARDO COLEMAN

“I can’t say that I’m interested in drumming, so to speak. Or ever was. But I was interested in what the drummers who played with my father were doing.”

vision, but I always had to remember that my dad’s music requires a different kind of a point guard. I couldn’t compare myself to others. I mean, Steph Curry is the best three-point shooter in the NBA of all time, but in the era where no one was shooting threes, no one was developing that [skill]. It was a different game in the past than it is in the present and will be in the future.”

As that “different kind of a point guard” behind the drums, the young Coleman had no idea how people learned or taught music. “People other than my father, that is,” he says. “Now I understand that better too. But Ornette [felt] that anybody is capable of expressing anything, and at any age. He was teaching me music, but not teaching me the drums. I mean, I had some outside drum lessons, but he wasn’t interested in that.”

The lessons Denardo *did* learn from his father were never hierarchical and completely bypassed the usual student/teacher dynamic. “Ornette treated me like an adult, always, asking my opinions … I didn’t realize that that wasn’t the norm. He was just wired a different way. I look back at a record like *Empty Foxhole*, and it’s not so much about the playing as it is the conversation, the exploration, the two- and three-hour talks that he would have before the rehearsals, enlightening us as to taking it all further. *Empty Foxhole* is me processing his conversation at 10 years old. *Sound Museum* is me processing his conversation at age 40. That’s fine for me.”

So what kind of rhythmic language did Denardo bring to that conversation? “I don’t think I have one, then or now,” he says with a laugh. “Never even thought about it. From the first album we did, I never had to think about being ‘locked in.’ In a harmolodic zone, you’re just so wide open that things change moment to moment. You’re reacting. No being tied down to go-tos. It is the opposite of one signature. You don’t want to be pinned down or have a pinned-down attitude. You’re just going with it. Ninety-nine percent of musicians get acquainted with the role first. The rules. With us, it was expression. It was playing.”

It’s for this very reason that Coleman hasn’t played with many people outside his father’s musical circle. The albums he’s made as a more traditional sideman can safely be counted on the fingers of one hand (they include dates with Ulmer and with Moffett’s son, the late bassist extraordinaire Charnett Moffett). “Because I have no interest in the role,” he laughs. “When you’ve been fortunate to have played in the environment that I have for so long—an environment that is truly engaging, an environment that was always *right there—that’s* what you want. What you crave. There was always so much to respond to with him. But he’s one of one.

“Now nobody’s Ornette, so I know that I’m going to have to generate more of the conversation. But interesting players are usually up for interesting conversation. For me to play, I have to be interested. Having played with Ornette so much, I know how to make things interesting, or at least I think I do. Best to look for those environments.”

Several years ago, Denardo Coleman attended the opening of a friend’s exhibition at an art gallery in Havana, Cuba. Once there, he felt a desire to play with local musicians, and so a series of sessions was organized at Areito Studios (run by EGREM, Cuba’s national record label) and its basement boîte Club EGREM. Fifteen players were there, mostly percussionists and horn people. “These guys were killing in the club at night, and I invited them upstairs during the day to play,” Denardo says. “I wanted to see if I could start a

COURTESY OF DENARDO COLEMAN

Denardo and Ornette at rest (left) and in action (right)

harmolodic band, from scratch, with these musicians in Cuba."

For nearly a year, Coleman traveled back and forth to Havana, hanging, rehearsing, and talking with these young musicians, just as his father had done with him. The biggest attraction was that he was going someplace where they had no idea who his father was, somewhere far apart from the "free jazz" conversation. "I wanted to be where there was no baggage," he says. "And once they got to harmolodics, everything opened up. But they have to get to harmolodics. It's not for everybody. I played with a lot of great musicians in Havana. Not everyone was there."

Yet.

While Denardo emphasizes that his work is more about process than product, his aim through his continuing travels is to keep setting up bands across the globe—like franchising—and treat those "energy spots" to harmolodics.

"Once you create those energies, further energies will link up," he says. "We had a nice big concert at the Havana Jazz Festival of harmolodic musicians [video footage of that 2018 "Cuba Is Now" showcase can be found on YouTube], recorded some sessions, and that album is in the can. I met musicians from the Dominican Republic and started a harmolodic band there. I went to Madagascar and started a harmolodic band."

And so on, and so on.

"We're recording everything, so maybe it's a series of albums," he laughs. "Maybe it's a Netflix thing: *Harmolodics Around the World*. And for now, I'm the principal drummer for all of these bands. But it doesn't have to stay that way. That's what I'm talking about—being the harmolodic point guard. I'm organizing the flow. But with BAM's *Shape of Jazz to Come* concert, I'm but one of 30 musicians. It's about putting the right energies together with the right people."

For Denardo as it was for Ornette, finding musicians who are young and not too trained is an essential part of spreading the harmolodic gospel. "As you get older, you get more indoctrinated to staid ways," he says. "You get pinned down to other people's systems. With Ornette, it was rejiggering expression."

Coleman has one further goal in mind, and it's a big one. "What I wanted to do," he explains, "as I believe everybody who's played with my father wants to do—we all knew that Ornette was putting together a harmolodic book [years in the making but famously never completed]. Now I have to pick up that baton and put that book together, show that there are alternative universes out there. But that book is spread across 200 books, each with their own formulas. That's harmolodic, philosophically: a manner in which to see and understand that there are multiple ways to think and do. Whatever resolution it is that you may think you want … there are many ways to get to that resolution.

"We've been restricted in the past by a 'this is it' mentality. Harmolodics opens that door. And once you look outside, there's a whole row of a thousand other rooms with their own doors and windows. That's a revelation. And that revelation takes your consciousness to a place where your creativity is energized in a way it wasn't before. To Ornette, music was an idea. And how to keep ideas flowing? Changing? Being fresh and interesting? He wasn't just challenging old ideas and attitudes. He said, 'Guess what? Look outside. You think this is your world? Open every door you can, even the doors you never knew existed.'" ***JT***

COURTESY OF DENARDO COLEMAN

NOT SUCH A BAD HOMBRE AFTER ALL

ANTONIO SÁNCHEZ is a virtuoso drummer and visionary composer who's constantly expanding the possibilities of his instrument. He's also a real sweetheart.

By Ted Panken | Photograph by Fernando Aceves

I can personally testify that Antonio Sánchez, who adopted the sobriquet "Bad Hombre" several years ago for a solo drums-and-electronics album, is a truly nice guy. On Labor Day afternoon, Sánchez and Thana Alexa, his wife and bandmate, who'd flown home early after playing the Detroit Jazz Festival the night before, showed me extreme hospitality when I visited their Jackson Heights apartment, two weeks after my initial Zoom conversation with Sánchez from his mother's Mexico City home. Then, on the subway home, my digital voice recorder fell from my bag—the journalist's worst fear. After receiving my mortified text, Sánchez immediately offered a do-over. "Things happen," he said during the Zoom makeup, with a *de nada* shrug.

They'd been in Detroit with Sánchez's Bad Hombres y Mujeres quartet, playing repertoire from his second Bad Hombre release, *SHIFT* (Warner Music), a 16-track drums-and-voice extravaganza on which he reimagines and remixes songs contributed by the likes of Lila Downs, Dave Matthews, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Trent Reznor, to name a shortlist of high Q-score participants. Sánchez recounted that Alexa sang everything, modifying her powerful, nuanced contralto with pedal-triggered harmonic-layering doublers and, when tackling parts written by the men, pitch-altering octavers; Big Yuki sound-explored on keyboards and synths; Lex Sadler fulfilled the groove function on electric bass and keyboard bass, and maneuvered on Ableton Live to manipulate backing tracks from the album for the band to play with, as well as opening up sections for interaction and soloing.

The 51-year-old drummer/composer assembled *SHIFT* during the COVID lockdown, using the compact basement studio he'd organized to execute film score commissions after creating the Grammy-winning solo drum soundtrack for Alejandro Iñárritu's *Birdman* in 2014. The new project gestated in 2018, when Sánchez, newly signed with Warner after the first *Bad Hombre* release, was looking for a fresh concept. While in Mexico City, he heard Silvana Estrada, a friend, perform "El Agua y la Miel" solo, accompanying herself on cuatro. He'd played it with her years before at New York's now-departed 55 Bar.

"It's a haunting, hypnotic, linear theme," Sánchez says. "As Silvana did it, I was hearing drums and synths, different basses, different harmonies, all these peaks and valleys. I decided to ask her to let me see what I could do. She recorded the voice and cuatro separately with a metronome, and sent it to me. I removed the cuatro in some places and changed the harmony. A bunch of instruments I'd bought for a film score were lying around, and I started layering guitars and mandolin—and also a lot of drums. After a month or two, I sent it to her. She told me, 'I never thought my tune could do this; I never imagined it being so epic.'"

He decided to extrapolate this m.o. into an album, and started thinking of artists to whom he might reach out. Ultimately, Sánchez harvested songs from the aforementioned individuals as well as a pan-lingual cohort including Kimbra, MARO, Ana Tijoux, SONICA (a three-woman group with Alexa, singer Nicole Zuraitis and bassist Julia Adamy), Alexa herself, and the guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela. He bookends the program with vignettes on which the eminent actor Ignacio López Tarso, Sánchez' grandfather, emcees, backgrounded by a street soundscape of voices and organilla from an imaginary town plaza, "inviting everybody to come in and sit down, fasten your seatbelts, and please pay attention to the bad hombre, because he's got a lot of secrets for you."

"My pitch to the artists was: 'I would like you to give me a song,'" Sánchez recounted. "'It could be old. It could be new. It could be a sketch. Anything you want to give me, I can work with.' I wanted them to work as little as possible, so they wouldn't feel overwhelmed and not want to do it. I said drums and voice would be the main ingredients.

FERNANDO ACEVES

I asked their permission to reimagine the song completely.

"I didn't want jazz people. I wanted people who write songs that aren't what I'd normally do, conceptually, aesthetically, technically or compositionally. I grew up listening to rock, and one fun thing about this project has been to revisit my love for really big, well-produced music that is sonically satisfying, where you discover layers of keyboards, strings, synths, guitars, voices. Usually, even on these incredibly well-produced records, one drum part anchors the whole thing. I decided to use the drums as a production tool—to layer them like keyboards or guitars, and have different-sounding drum sets coming from different areas of the sonic spectrum."

As an example, Sánchez referenced his treatment of "I Think We're Past That Now" by Reznor, whom he'd met at the post-*Birdman* Golden Globe Award ceremonies. "Trent said he'd do something new for me," Sánchez said. "He went into the studio with [Nine Inch Nails bandmate] Atticus Ross; a few weeks later, I had a Pro Tools session with a bunch of his voices and a few of Atticus' synths. I started hearing this kind of industrial rock anthem. As I edited and layered his voices, I thought it would be great to have background vocals, which I did myself. And I recorded all the instruments—basses, guitars and, of course, a bunch of drums. Trent was surprised when he heard the track; I think he expected something *Birdman*-like, atmospheric drums on top of what he sent me. He said: 'This is an actual tune. I haven't stopped listening to it. I want to get you involved with my mixing engineer so we can extract maybe 15% more out of your mix.'"

To surprise the guest artists, "not mak[ing] the song do the obvious thing that it seems the song wants to do" was a core intention. "I saw it as someone allowing me to perform plastic surgery on their baby," Sánchez said. "A song is very personal; it touched me that they let me do my thing. Probably they thought I'd jazz it up a bit more. But that's what I didn't want to do—although my years as a jazz drummer and composer definitely inform the album. I think *SHIFT* has a certain sensitivity and nuance that other rock or hip-hop albums don't. I wanted to imprint that in this music, while staying loyal to the songs."

MIDWAY THROUGH OUR second conversation, perhaps to make me more comfortable after I'd lost my recorder, Sánchez related an experience that could serve as a textbook anxiety dream. He prefaced it with an account of his rocky first year at Berklee, where he matriculated in 1993. His mother (Ignacio López Tarso's daughter), a highly educated, poorly paid film historian, critic, and public intellectual who raised Sánchez herself, maxed out her credit card for his tuition, then fell exponentially further into debt after a peso devaluation. Compounding matters, her car had been stolen and she'd broken up with her romantic partner.

"JUST AS I WANTED TO GET RID OF MY ACCENT WHEN SPEAKING ENGLISH, I WANTED TO LOSE MY ACCENT—ROCK-FUSION, OR WHATEVER THAT ACCENT WAS—WHEN I WAS PLAYING JAZZ OR LATIN OR ANYTHING ELSE."

Up north in Boston, Sánchez—broke, lonesome, overwhelmed with coursework—was concerned for his mother. During the first semester, as he played an arsenal of fancy licks on a "humongous" kit (22" bass drum, seven cymbals and double bass pedal, to be precise) for a bebop ensemble on "Pent-Up House," the instructor stripped his set in real time, leaving him with a hi-hat, bass drum, snare drum and ride cymbal. Then he admonished him to "solo in the form and trade choruses." "Nobody wanted to play with me," Sánchez recalled. On break in Mexico City, he told his mother he wanted to skip the next semester. She replied, "If you stay, I don't think I'll be able to help you go back a semester from now."

Sánchez "reluctantly" returned to Boston. Immediately thereafter, he was "amazed" to receive Berklee's biannual Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship, with a mandate to open the scholarship concert at New York's Manhattan Center with a drum solo, witnessed by his idol, Rush's Neil Peart, and a host of other "heroes," who later "congratulated me and high-fived me and hugged me"—a dream come true. Other scholarships followed, and Sánchez "started to get little opportunities to play here and there."

His first such opportunity (the story's denouement) was a gig with a Polish singer "at a Polish convention center." After setting up, Sánchez entered the bathroom to change into his rented, well-pressed tuxedo. "I start putting my shirt on, and the suit—and then all of a sudden, I'm like: 'Where are the pants?' It was the middle of summer and I was in shorts. I could not believe this was happening." The singer told him to move the drum set to the corner, cover his legs, and not stand up for the whole gig, even to go to the bathroom. "I was like, 'Yes, of course; whatever needs to be done, I'll do it.'"

Perhaps Sánchez's ups and downs during these formative years account for his kind, empathetic response to my calamity. But the anecdote also hints at the prodigious work ethic, keen intellect, deep focus, and raw talent that catapulted him to the pinnacle of jazz drumming over the ensuing decade.

Early on, Sánchez learned the drums playing along to his mother's comprehensive collection of rock albums with "big, big sounds," spanning *Sgt. Pepper* to Led Zeppelin, U2, Pink Floyd, and Peter Gabriel. "I also grew up listening to lots of Colombian and Cuban music—boleros, danzon and cha-chas and salsa, which I wouldn't have heard in the States," he says. "It was in the background. My grandfather listened to classical music at lunch when I was living with him. That was in my subconscious too."

Jazz came into view after Sánchez saw Milos Forman's Mozart biopic *Amadeus*. "I got obsessed with the idea of a genius child prodigy," he says. "I thought, 'I want to be like that; I want to feel I can do something special.' I wanted to learn piano. I wanted to learn to write classical music." In 1988, he enrolled in Mexico's National Conservatory, where a friend gave him a cassette of the Chick Corea Elektric Band album *Light Years*, with Dave Weckl on drums.

"I'd never heard anything like it, so heavy and deep compared to rock & roll," he says.

"Immediately I felt something going on that I wanted to learn. I always liked improvising; even as a child I'd play for hours. Now I started naturally going more in the jazz direction without really knowing that's what it was. I played Debussy, Satie, and Mozart, and analyzed scores—how Mozart wrote a symphony by developing just one motif. I didn't realize until later that I could apply all the elements of motivic development—form, the use of space, repetition, extreme dynamics—to what I wanted to do."

Toward the aim of "finding out why swing sounds the way it sounds," he took lessons with and listened to iconic drummers recommended by the instructor who'd stripped his set. Via Berklee's polyglot student body, Sánchez assimilated, with painstaking thoroughness, Afro-diasporic rhythms of Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and Panama. "In Mexico, I'd played Latin music, but it was peripheral to me," he says. "At Berklee, I met people who'd been doing this as kids. I studied congas, a little batá drums, timbales, bongos, different cowbells, to see where all those parts that Cuban drummers like Horacio Hernandez and Ignacio Berroa were playing come from."

As Sánchez absorbed the various beats, he evolved his own musical poetics. "I developed what I used to call 'extreme independence,' where one limb did the clave, while at the top I played different claves at different time signatures and different tempos," he recalls. "It was fun. I did it because I wanted to play that music really well. Same thing with Brazilian music. I felt I had a thick accent playing all these different musics and, just as I wanted to get rid of my accent when speaking English, I wanted to lose my accent—rock-fusion, or whatever that accent was—when I was playing jazz or Latin or anything else."

Michael League, who is producing a forthcoming album on which Sánchez and conguero/singer Pedrito Martínez improvise and dialogue on various Afro-Cuban-Yoruban themes, opines that Sánchez transcended that aspiration. "When I'm teaching or engaging with music students outside the United States, Antonio, Joe Zawinul and John McLaughlin are the first examples that I give of people who did not grow up in the culture that birthed the music they're known for playing, and yet have been able to completely embed themselves in that musical culture, and not only contribute to it with authenticity and fluidity, but actually create space for their own voice," League says. "That's why people call them. To me, Antonio is the textbook of the way to do it."

THE MORNING AFTER our second conversation, Sánchez would join bassist Linda May Han Oh and pianist Gwilym Simcock—his bandmates on Pat Metheny's 2020 CD *From This Time*—at a Manhattan rehearsal studio to prepare for a three-week Southern Hemisphere tour to cover COVID-canceled bookings (originally scheduled for March 2020) in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Lima, Santiago, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City. *From This Time* is Sánchez's ninth album with Metheny since 2002; among the others are two Grammy-winners with the Pat Metheny Group, another two in Metheny's trio with Christian McBride, and another two with Metheny's Unity Band.

"TO ME, JAZZ TODAY IS NOT REALLY ABOUT THE SOUND OF JAZZ. IT'S FREEDOM. IT'S GIVEN ME A HARMONIC AND RHYTHMIC PROWESS THAT I CAN NOW APPLY TO ANYTHING."

Each album showcases Sánchez's propensity, as League puts it, "for interacting without in any way compromising the groove." "First, you have to learn Pat's language, which is completely informed by jazz and bebop," Sánchez said. "But you're not playing jazz and bebop. The interaction is totally based on jazz, but the delivery is different. A lot of it, especially the Pat Metheny Group, is very straight eighth-note-based. I think he felt comfortable with me because I came more from straight eighth-note playing than from swing. Once we'd played a staggering number of gigs for years and years, he decided I was ready to make my own decisions within his framework."

Sánchez credits Metheny's 68-minute epic *The Way Up* (2005), on which he played, as a strong influence on the "long-form storytelling" compositions for his own *Meridian Suite* (CAM Jazz, 2014)—in the program notes Sánchez compared it to a "musical novel," with compositions developing "the way a novelist develops a story and its characters"—and Lines in the Sand (CAM Jazz, 2019). Rather than mirror the particulars of Metheny's vocabulary, Sánchez borrows from his aesthetic, creating strong melodies from complex ideas and contextualizing them within an epic narrative frame.

Because of his mother's profession, Sánchez became a moviegoer as a young child. His grandfather, now 97, appeared in 50 films, more than 100 theatrical productions, and several dozen telenovelas and TV series. So it's no surprise that Sánchez imparts to the aforementioned albums—and his pieces on *Trio Grande* (Whirlwind, 2020), a lovely collaborative date with Will Vinson and Gilad Hekselman—the sensibility of an imaginary soundtrack. His background also informs Sánchez's uncanny signifying on the passages in *Birdman* that depict the mental breakdown of Michael Keaton's sometimes pantsless Birdman character.

"It's a tribute to Iñárritu that Antonio's voice and the color of the drums and where it sits in the soundscape of the movie is something that he wanted," says Vince Mendoza, who arranged and orchestrated eight Sánchez pieces with the WDR Orchestra and the composer on drums on *Channels of Energy* (CAM Jazz, 2018). "It's also a tribute to Iñárritu that he's speaking a different language of music inside his narrative than most filmmakers ever thought about doing. I mean, what music do you hear when you hear heartbreak or struggle or humor or anger? This was a different language to express that narrative." Mendoza added that for his recent *Freedom Over Everything*, a long suite for symphonic orchestra and rhythm section, he wanted Sánchez for his ability "to drive the bus, but with great poetry and a sense of color and emotion in a way we don't really expect a big-band drummer to contribute."

"I improvised the original demos for *Birdman* off the script according to what Iñárritu explained to me before they started shooting," Sánchez says. "He brought the demos to the set to rehearse with. He told me the drums sounded too clean. I always pride myself, of course, on having my drums sound great, but he wanted me to dirty it up. 'I want the drums to sound like they've been

ALAN NAHIGIAN

in storage for 50 years, because it happens in the bowels of an old Broadway theater,' he said. 'How can we make the drums sound that way?' I started putting T-shirts on the drums and detuning them purposely, stacking cymbals on top of cymbals to make them sound trashy, like somebody throwing the drums down a set of stairs. It ended up an organic, flow-like way of playing.

"The first *Bad Hombre* was a continuation of 'What can I do with the drum set as the main instrument?'—but because the drums were overlapping with all the electronics and technology and click tracks, I had to tighten things up. With the evolution to *SHIFT*, where the songs are not mine, I tried to be free of preconceptions and stylistic boundaries, and play what I hear nowadays. It's a very interesting progression for me in terms of the instrument itself."

Directly after returning to New York from his September-October sojourn with Metheny, Sánchez—and Alexa—would embark on a lengthy tour with Bad Hombres y Mujeres behind *SHIFT*, which, as of this writing, has some 400,000 Spotify hits. I asked if he approaches this music with a different mindset than he brings to Metheny's.

"*SHIFT* is completely different from any gig I've done," Sánchez says. "For one thing, I play to a click track. On Saturday in Detroit, I played with Donny McCaslin; it was a blast, so open—I could do whatever I wanted. Now, going out with Pat, I'll have to switch my whole thing again, though I know it will come out naturally because I've done it so much with him. A good sideman drummer has to be able literally to switch hats, depending on the situation. And then, on my own gig, I have to switch hats radically from when I'm playing with other people. I feel my responsibility is to keep making things happen, which sometimes makes you force things, not relax and let the music flow where it needs to flow. The adrenalin is different, the anxiety is different. That's a constant challenge that I struggle with."

Sánchez at the Jazz Standard in 2010

Both Alexa and League—who booked Bad Hombres y Mujeres to play his Ground-Up festival in Miami last May—feel that Sánchez's *SHIFT* hat is a beautiful fit. "Antonio has kept the integrity of the original songs but elevated them," Alexa said. "Then, in the live performance, he doesn't want us to copy what's on the record. Through the four of us, we've figured out ways to expand [the songs] in the live setting. Everybody is featured. We're each allowed to bring to the table what we do as artists."

While acknowledging the individuality of the protagonists, League adds that, to his ears, the band projects "a feeling of anonymity that you also feel when you hear a rock band, where it's like a wall of sound that's created by, yes, individuals, but individuals who are not thinking about featuring themselves. They are committed 100% to the musical content within the songs. Everyone on that stage is an all-star, but none of them play like it. It's like a dream team where no one plays hero ball, everyone's passing all the time, and they're working together."

Which is precisely Sánchez's intention. "At the end of the day, I want the show to be about the songs," he said. "Solos should be in the service of the songs, not like a jazz gig where the melody is an excuse to explore all the possibilities. We're not playing jazz, but at the same time it's completely informed by jazz. To me, jazz today is not really about the sound of jazz. It's freedom. It's given me a harmonic and rhythmic prowess that I can now apply to anything.

"I consider 'Bad Hombre' an alter ego that allows me total freedom to go wherever I feel. It's genre-bending, exploring sonorities, exploring styles. I'm not thinking I want this record to be this or that. It just happens—the alter ego allows things to flow. It's informed by jazz, by rock, by fusion, by electronic music, by world music. Of course, I knew some jazz purists would be completely ticked off. But usually that means you're moving forward. And I like moving forward." ***JT***

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2022-23 Jazz Education Guide ★★★

Vijay Iyer

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Issues of racial and gender equity and justice are as deeply entrenched in jazz education as in any other part of society. They've become increasingly difficult to ignore—and jazz people increasingly don't *want* to ignore them.

By Michael J. West

EBRU YILDIZ

About a year after he began working at Harvard University, pianist/composer Vijay Iyer was in a faculty meeting. A visiting committee—a group of academics from peer institutions—had studied and issued a report on the Harvard music department. Among its findings was that there was a diversity problem among music majors; the overwhelming majority of them were White men.

At the time, the curriculum was also overwhelmingly centered on the European classical tradition. Its repertoire, music theory, and music history all leaned hard on the so-called "Western canon." When the department chair asked the faculty to respond to the report, Iyer—the only non-White person present—watched as silence filled the room.

He finally blurted out his thoughts. "Well, if students don't see themselves reflected in our curriculum," he asked, "why should they come to us?"

"People just let it sit for a while," Iyer recalls today. "Afterwards, some of my colleagues texted me and said, 'I'm so glad that you said that.' And I was like, 'Well, why didn't you say it? Why are you just sitting on this obvious truth?'"

It took a while for his observation to take hold. "But after that," he adds, "the entire curriculum was unmade and remade. Now it's very much a work in progress, but there are now many different ways to be a music concentrator at Harvard. It's not only the old-fashioned way; that still exists but there are other ways. So if you're in the room, you can sometimes make a small amount of difference that matters."

Terri Lyne Carrington, the drummer/composer who is also the founder and director of the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, agrees. Being there, and being ready to take the initiative, is the most important part of addressing race and gender inequity (in jazz education or anywhere else).

"The very fact that the Institute exists forces other entities at the college to look at their practices," she says. "We have to work with administration, admissions, ensemble departments, recording departments. So in figuring out how to work together, everybody has to look at themselves, at how they're contributing to these inequities, and at what their students feel about that. So we're setting an example, in a sense, that other people can jump on—or not, but they'll at least be forced to look at their practices."

Racial and gender issues are as deeply entrenched (if not more so) in jazz and jazz education as in any other facet of society. And, just as in those other facets, they have become increasingly difficult to overlook. What's more, jazz people increasingly don't want to overlook them.

"It's all kinda coming to the surface now: Everybody's finally concerned in our field," Carrington says. "With #MeToo and #TimesUp, and then the whole racial reckoning that happened in 2020, it seems like everybody came out of their slumber. And I think that's a great thing, and people are finding their way."

Even if current events somehow don't move one's conscience, University of North Texas lab band coordinator Alan Baylock argues, the music itself often does. "Everyone wants the music to be at the highest possible level," he asserts. "And balancing the scale, eliminating the White male domination, has a positive effect: It makes the music better. It makes the music-making experience better."

Yet even as that makes engaging with these issues more crucial, it does not make the engagement easier either to sell or to accomplish. Much of academia and no small share of the music industry is designed to protect and reinforce the status quo. Achieving change either in the classroom or on the bandstand requires facing down strong headwinds.

Still, the problems of prejudice, discrimination, and racial and gender equity aren't going away. If anything, they'll only be more heavily scrutinized as time goes on. This article offers a few "best practices" in exploring and dealing with them as an educator with students, but also as an artist with an audience. We've already discussed the first of those practices: Be present and be ready. Here are some more.

KNOW THE REAL HISTORY—AND TEACH IT.

It seems fundamental, doesn't it? No music exists in a vacuum. You should't teach Gregorian polyphony or Bach's court music without religious, political, and social context, so why would you do so with jazz? "You have to know what it is you're playing about," says violinist Regina Carter, who teaches at both Manhattan School of Music and New Jersey City University. "I usually start with the blues, field calls, field hollers. For a lot of them it may not resonate, but at least they have the history and can understand why the music sounds the way it does. It's a cry."

This is especially important for jazz. Nearly all conservatories and music departments require music history courses. But these are often biased toward Western (i.e., European) music history.

"When I got to Harvard, it was like, 'Take these six semesters of Western music theory, these four semesters of Western music history, and maybe then you will have earned the right to study something else,'" Iyer recalls. "It was beyond conservative—it was basically a White supremacist curriculum."

That said, the history itself is not just context for the music: It has context of its own.

Carter, whose current musical project *Gone in a Phrase of Air* explores how highways and other urban developments have historically displaced African American communities, remembers that as a student "I hated history. And as I look back, I feel like it would have been easier if all my subjects lined up. If what I was learning in history class lined up with what I was learning in music, with what I was learning elsewhere—if it all had a connection." *Gone in a Phrase of Air* put her back into the history student's seat, and now finds her becoming a kind of teacher to an audience, although she works to mitigate that. "It's just really got me thinking, 'Okay, how can I deal with some of the things that are going on in this country without it feeling like I'm lecturing someone?' so that people can handle the information and talk about what to do going forward."

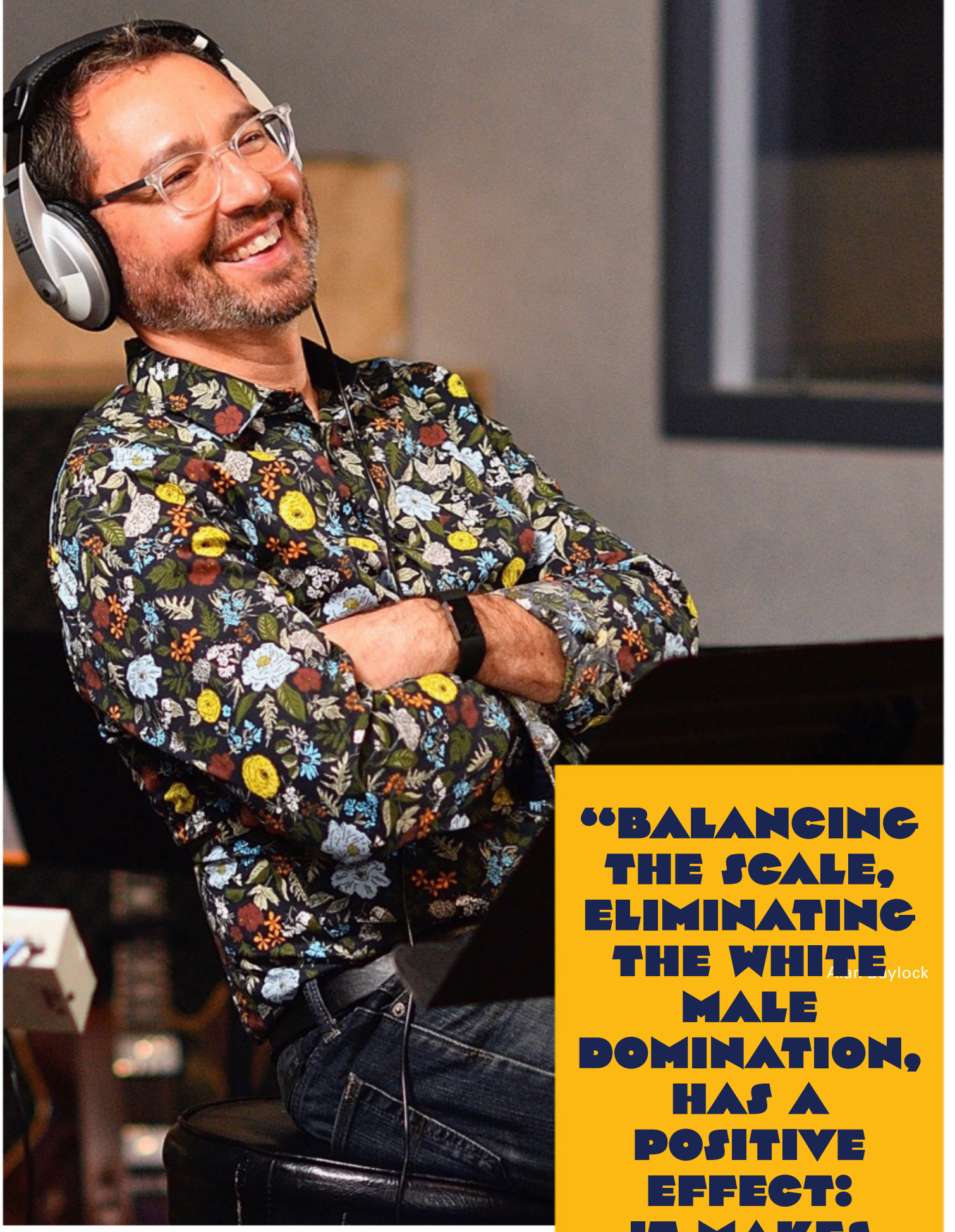
As Carter well knows, the history surrounding jazz—both of the music itself and of African Americans—has been sanitized and selectively edited for decades. This does neither students nor the music any favors. In particular, jazz history features a profound erasure of women and their importance to the music, as Iyer found when he taught a class that surveyed six different composer/pianists: Lil Hardin Armstrong, Hazel Scott, Mary Lou Williams, Nina Simone, Alice Coltrane, and Geri Allen.

"I had students who were actually viscerally angry that they had never heard [Mary Lou Williams' album] *Black Christ of the Andes*," he says. "It came out around the same time as *Kind of Blue and Giant Steps*. It should have become a classic on the order of those other albums, but it did not. So why not? We found that the history we've been told about this music is wrong. It's profoundly incomplete. Those women could and should be seen as the backbone of 20th-century music."

Carrington has taken an ambitious step

toward correcting that history. This year she published *New Standards*, a collection of 101 compositions—each by a different female composer. "Berklee Press liked the idea from the beginning, but then the question was why so many, and *are* there really that many quality composers?" Carrington recalls. "And I'm like, are you kidding me? So then I was even more driven to make sure there was a lot. A hundred isn't even that many! Plenty of others had no problem telling me that they felt left out."

"What Terri Lyne just did with those 101 lead sheets, that's one of the best ideas that anybody in the world ever had," gushes pianist Monika Herzig, who teaches at Indiana University (and whose work is included in *New Standards*). "I actually saw her yesterday and I had to give her a big hug."



"BALANCING THE SCALE, ELIMINATING THE WHITE MALE DOMINATION, HAS A POSITIVE EFFECT: IT MAKES THE MUSIC BETTER."

–Alan Baylock, University of North Texas

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RESOURCES ARE MORE PLENTIFUL THAN YOU THINK. BUT WHERE THEY'RE LACKING, CREATE YOUR OWN.

Carrington's project shows the truth of both parts of this practice. There was no shortage of great jazz charts by women composers; she had more trouble limiting the number than she did reaching it. But the point was that there were no available *collections* of their music. Having gathered existing resources, she used them to fashion a new one, which has already brought significant new visibility to the material she marshalled.

That's not her only self-created resource, though. The Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice is a remarkable asset. "There's what our students call the 'jazz bro' culture," she says, referring to the cutthroat, testosterone-driven "boys' club" atmosphere that has long dominated the music. "It's pervasive, and it's what has been the ruling class of jazz for so long, but there's kind of a revolution happening because we're like, 'Oh, no, we're done with this!' We have to all live and work together.

"So we started the institute to provide a space so that women could study without the extra burdens that their male counterparts aren't dealing with. That said, our institute is probably about 50-50 with gender. We also have some nonbinary and trans musicians. But the young men that come to our institute, in most cases they're tired of the masculinity that prevails in the environment of jazz. They don't want

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to have to perform it, so they're seemingly relieved." And the institute is more than just a classroom environment: It partners with external organizations for initiatives like the Next Jazz Legacy (cosponsored with New Music USA), a program that provides grants and professional mentorships for female and nonbinary jazz musicians.

Baylock and UNT are following her lead. The school has its own student-led program, the Jazz and Gender Equity Initiative, that's designed to educate and support people and to create and educate allies. In collaboration with pianist/composer Annie Booth, Baylock has been building his own reservoir of lead sheets, focusing on big-band arrangements where Carrington focused on combos. "In our jazz library at North Texas, we have thousands of big-band charts—but only a couple dozen written by women," he says. "So that encouraged Annie and me to come up with this publishing company, Brava Jazz Publishing. I thought it'd be great to have a one-stop shop. And not only is it things that are already published, but we'll be commissioning new work as well."

At Indiana, Herzig is also passionate about enlarging the space for women in jazz. Her primary concern, though, is for the women themselves. There are various aspects to that concern (many of which are explored in her coedited book, *The Routledge Companion to Jazz and Gender*), but one particularly appealed to her: There need to be more role models that girls and young women can access and emulate. Hence her creation of Sheroes, a nine-piece all-female ensemble that released a self-titled album in 2018. "I just said, 'Okay, I'm gonna showcase all these amazing players, in a way that is noticeable, so you can see there are people doing this. There are women playing jazz at a really high level.'"

In Herzig's case, she can claim some real influence. Pianist Renee Rosnes has since created a similar but higher-profile (i.e., signed to Blue Note Records) band called Artemis. It's no coincidence, Herzig feels, that Artemis shares trumpeter Ingrid Jensen with Sheroes. "I kind of want to claim my space of saying, 'Artemis was formed after our model!'" she says. "Ingrid was part of my group, and people started paying attention!"

Of the educators interviewed for this article, Iyer probably has the greatest access to resources, in the conventional sense of the term: Harvard has a $53 billion endowment, the largest in the world. Nevertheless, he created his own: an entire curriculum, Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry (CPCI). "It's a combination of musicmaking courses, and more academic courses at the undergraduate and graduate level," he says. "There's been a lot of one-on-one mentoring of projects."

In that capacity, Iyer does not identify as a "jazz educator." His interest is both broader and more difficult to define. CPCI's Ph.D. program, which accepts one new student per year, also comprises faculty members esperanza spalding and Yosvany Terry, and encourages musicians to incorporate more academic, cross-disciplinary classes into their learning. For example, its newest participant, pianist Fabian Almazan, is currently studying climate justice.

> **"IF STUDENTS DON'T SEE THEMSELVES REFLECTED IN OUR CURRICULUM, WHY SHOULD THEY COME TO US?"**
>
> –Vijay Iyer, Harvard University

"We facilitate things like that, so they would not just be dabbling, they'd be on the cutting edge of research in these different disciplines," Iyer says. "We can expand the footprint of what an artist is."

THERE WILL BE PUSHBACK. BE PREPARED TO FACE IT.

Resistance to these kinds of initiatives seems always to be present. Sometimes, as in Iyer's case, it's active. The whole reason his CPCI program exists is because of the resistance he encountered at Harvard: Iyer originally applied for a position in music composition, only to find that the other (classical) composers were the only people in the department who didn't support his hiring. He was eventually brought into an indefinite, "at large" position.

"That was Eurocentric exclusion, is what that was," he says. "I have built my own presence there, and it's become a very collective presence now, it's not just me. But it was in the context of exclusion. It has been around throughout, and we've had to find a way to shoehorn ourselves into the culture of the music department there. They've been slow to come to grips with who and what we are."

Having fought his way through that resistance, Iyer now reacts to it by siloing it off from himself. "That's not my problem. That's theirs," he says. "What I'm interested in is, how can I help these incredible artists to be more and do more, and how can I support their journeys? And as an educator, that's what I'm trying to do."

The resistance that Herzig has encountered has more to do with fear of taking risks. On the institutional level, that means faculty chairs who aren't willing to hire outside their own networks. Hence the historical shortage of women in those networks perpetuates itself, not creating new opportunities. "When you do hiring decisions, you would have to step out of your comfort zone," she says. "Often the pushback is 'We're not getting enough applicants,' or 'the applicants are not at the same level.' But every time *I* get a notice saying someone's hiring and I put out a call to *my* circle of friends saying, 'Apply here,' suddenly the pool of female applicants becomes larger."

On the performing level, she sees a similar risk-averseness: The audience for Sheroes concerts looks different from the usual jazz club crowds, with more women and fewer of the hardcore regulars. "That worries the presenters. Even though you will build a new audience and a different audience, you need the hardcores in the end! You can't scare them away." As a result, clubs will book bands like Sheroes once a year—and more often it will be a higher-profile act like Artemis.

Herzig's response is simply to soldier on. "We didn't play any of the really big festivals," she says of Sheroes. "We did some of the cool clubs and maybe didn't get all of the audience members immediately that were expected, which might just be us on our first time. It's hard work, but I'm not complaining; we did some really great things." She also uses her networks to enlarge those of her academic colleagues and pushes them to take a chance on someone they don't know. The latter, at least, she says is paying off: "Right now it's really exciting to be in on the hiring of a lot of young

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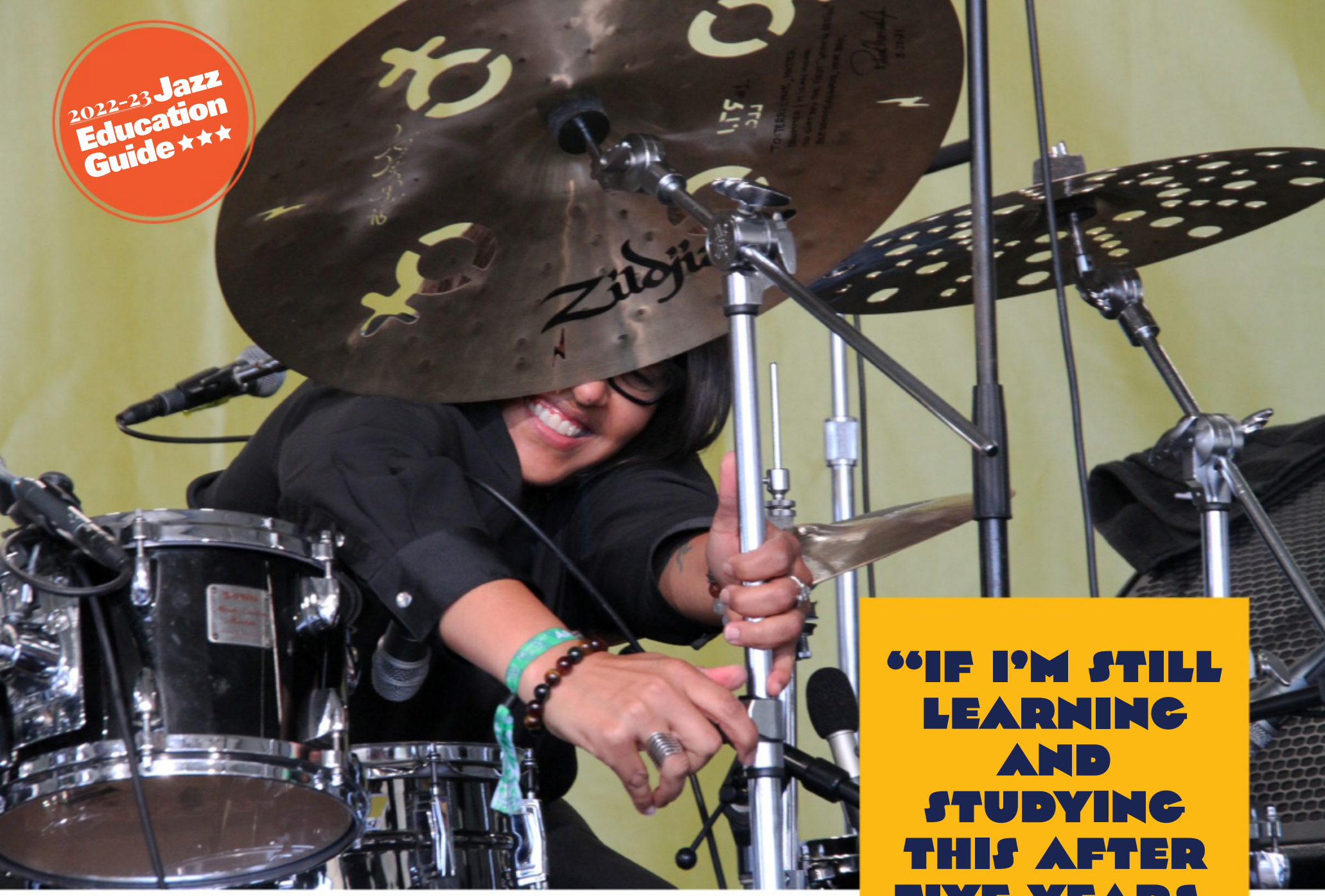

Terri Lyne Carrington, bringing gender equity to cymbals (and many other things): "You don't need us to tell you what to do. You already know the answers."

female players, fresh out of their doctorate. That's where we see the change."

Baylock, on the other hand, accepts blowback as an inevitable side effect of the changes he's advocating, and he's made his peace with that. In 2020, he was part of UNT's decision to change the name of Kenton Hall, its primary rehearsal and recital venue, in response to allegations of its namesake (bandleader Stan Kenton) having made racist remarks and sexually assaulted his daughter. Kenton is a tentpole figure in UNT's jazz history, having donated his entire library to the school; removing his name from the hall was going to cause considerable consternation among donors and alumni.

The school did it anyway. Some alumni pulled their support and publicly criticized the move. "That's a growing pain right there," Baylock says. "If we lose support of some alum, it's okay. Because there's a bigger picture. Of course our history is about more than one or two people. So the way I felt was, it's worth it! Because we feel like we're doing the right thing and we need to move things forward."

DON'T TRY TO OUTSOURCE THE WORK.

Just about everyone concerned with these issues, inside and outside of academia, sings Terri Lyne Carrington's praises for her work. (Iyer calls it "hugely transformative.") So much so, in fact, that other institutions frequently ask her to visit their campuses, to lecture or Zoom with their faculties and tell them how to do what she's doing.

Consulting the experts is always a good start. But, she warns, it sometimes feels like these other institutions think that's enough.

"You can't just address it by bringing someone like me in for the week," Carrington says. "You have to study! You have to read! You have to research! And I think a lot of people are just busy and don't necessarily want to take that extra time; it's easier just to bring some people to their schools without really doing the research. But I've been researching it myself for five and a half years. And I'm still not a scholar of this. So if I, who's very passionate about this topic—if *I'm* still learning and studying after five years, there's no quick fix. Asking us to do this work for other people is just adding *more* labor onto us."

"IF I'M STILL LEARNING AND STUDYING THIS AFTER FIVE YEARS, THERE'S NO QUICK FIX."

–Terri Lyne Carrington, Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice

More than that, however, Carrington advises that real engagement requires real desire and real commitment. "I always say, 'You don't need us to tell you what to do. You just have to look within yourself and divorce yourself from the "ruling classes" in jazz. You already know the answers.'

"I don't think anybody's expected to know everything, or to do everything correctly," she adds. "But I do think it's a time where you have to decide where you stand. You have to really decide if you care enough about your fellow human beings to make some changes. Or, in our case, if you care about the music enough so that it has the most potential to be developed. A lot of people are looking to us as leadership for this, but we can't do everything for everyone." ***JT***

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Primary contact: Andy Nevala
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928-523-3496, christopher.finet@nau.edu

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csub.edu/music
Primary contact: Joel Haney
661-654-2541, jhaney@csub.edu

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Music Department
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csuchico.edu/muta
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udc.edu
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202-274-5803, jkorey@udc.edu
Jazz contact: Allyn Johnson
202-274-5811, arjohnson@udc.edu

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Miami Dade College
Wolfson Campus, 300 NE 2nd
Ave., Miami, FL 33132
mdc.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Michael Di Liddo
305-237-3930, mdiliddo@mdc.edu

New World School of the Arts
300 NE 2nd Ave., Miami, FL 33132
mdc.edu/nwsa
Primary contact: Dr. Jeffrey Hodgson
305-237-3417, jhodgson@mdc.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
305-237-7408, nwsainfo@mdc.edu
Jazz contact: Jim Gasior
305-237-3946, jgasior@mdc.edu

Seminole State College
Music Dept.
100 Weldon Blvd., Sanford, FL 32773
seminolestate.edu/arts/music
Primary contact: James J. Smisek
407-708-2077, smisekj@seminolestate.edu

University of Central Florida
School of Performing Arts
4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando, FL 32816
music.cah.ucf.edu/jazz
Jazz contact: Jeff Rupert
407-823-5411, jeffrupert@ucf.edu

University of Miami
Frost School of Music
PO Box 248165, Coral Gables, FL 33124
frost.miami.edu
Admissions contact: Karen Kerr
305-284-2247, kmkerr@miami.edu
Jazz contact: John Daversa
305-284-4012, j.daversa@miami.edu

University of North Florida
Music Flagship Program
1 UNF Dr., Jacksonville, FL 32224
unf.edu/coas/music
Jazz contact: J.B. Scott
904-620-3847, jbscott@unf.edu

University of South Florida
School of Music
4202 E. Fowler Ave., FAH 110, Tampa, FL 33617
music.arts.usf.edu/content/go/jazz
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
813-974-2011, admissions@usf.edu
Jazz contact: Jack Wilkins
813-974-2311, wilkins@arts.usf.edu

GEORGIA

Augusta University
2500 Walton Way, Augusta, GA 30904
augusta.edu/pamplin/music
Jazz contact: Dr. Robert Foster
706-667-4875, rfoster@augusta.edu

Clayton State University
School of Arts & Sciences, Department of Music
2000 Clayton State Blvd., Morrow, GA 30260
clayton.edu
Jazz contact: Stacey Houghton
678-466-4750, staceyhoughton@clayton.edu

Columbus State University
4225 University Ave., Columbus, GA 31906
music.columbusstate.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
706-507-8800, esc@columbusstate.edu
Jazz contact: Jordan VanHemert
vanhemert_jordan@columbusstate.edu

Georgia State University
School of Music
PO Box 4097, Atlanta, GA 30302
music.gsu.edu
Primary contact: GSU School of Music
404-413-5910, music@gsu.edu
Jazz contact: Devin Reid
404-413-5961, treid12@gsu.edu

Kennesaw State University
471 Bartow Ave. NW, Kennesaw, GA 30144
kennesaw.edu
Jazz contact: Sam Skelton
770-423-6554, sskelton@kennesaw.edu

University of Georgia
Hugh Hodgson School of Music
250 River Rd., Athens, GA 30602
uga.edu
Jazz contact: David D'Angelo
706-542-3737, ddangelo@uga.edu

Valdosta State University
1500 N. Patterson St., Valdosta, GA 31698
valdosta.edu/music/jazz
Primary contact: Isrea Butler
229-333-5804, ibutler@valdosta.edu
Jazz contact: David Springfield
229-333-5805, daspring@valdosta.edu

IDAHO

College of Southern Idaho
Music Dept.
315 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, ID 83301
csi.edu
Primary contact: Ben Britton
208-732-6765, bbritton@csi.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
208-732-6221, admissions@csi.edu

University of Idaho
Lionel Hampton School of Music
Corner of Blake & W. Sweet Ave.,
Moscow, ID 83844-4015
uidaho.edu/class/music
Jazz contact: Vern Sielert
208-885-4955, verns@uidaho.edu

ILLINOIS

Augustana College
639 38th St., Rock Island, IL 61201
augustana.edu
Admissions contact: Margaret Ellis
309-794-7333, margaretellis@augustana.edu
Jazz contact: John J. Cummins
309-794-7639, johncummins@augustana.edu

Benedictine University
5700 College Rd., Lisle, IL 60532
benedictine.edu
Admissions contact: Enrollment Center
630-829-6300, admissions@ben.edu

Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University
430 Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605
roosevelt.edu/colleges/ccpa
Jazz contact: Scott Mason
312-341-6947, smason@roosevelt.edu

College of Lake County
19351 W. Washington St., Grayslake, IL 60030
clcillinois.edu
Primary contact: Michael Flack
847-543-2566, com422@clcillinois.edu

Columbia College Chicago
600 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605
colum.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
312-369-7130, admissions@colum.edu
Jazz contact: Scott Hall
312-369-6322, shall@colum.edu

DePaul University
School of Music
804 W. Belden Ave., Chicago, IL 60614
music.depaul.edu
Admissions contact: Ross Beacraft
773-325-7444, musicadmissions@depaul.edu
Jazz contact: Dana Hall
773-325-4381, dhall1@depaul.edu

Eastern Illinois University
Department of Music
600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920
eiu.edu/music
Primary contact: Sam Fagaly
217-581-6628, swfagaly@eiu.edu

Elmhurst College
190 Prospect, Elmhurst, IL 60126
elmhurst.edu
Admissions contact: Gayle Bisesi
630-617-3524, music.admission@elmhurst.edu
Jazz contact: Kirk Garrison
kirk.garrison@elmhurst.edu

Illinois State University
Woonsok Kim College of Fine Arts
Campus Box 5660, Normal, IL 61790
cfa.ilstu.edu/music
Admissions contact: Janet Tulley
309-438-3566, jatulle@ilstu.edu
Jazz contact: Tom Marko
309-438-2541, tjmarko@ilstu.edu

Knox College
2 E. South St., Galesburg, IL 61401
knox.edu
Primary contact: Nikki Malley
309-341-7265, nmalley@knox.edu

Millikin University
1184 W. Main, Decatur, IL 62522
millikin.edu
Admissions contact: Kimberly Dial
800-373-7733, auditioncoordinator@millikin.edu
Jazz contact: Randall Reyman
217-424-6319, rreyman@mail.millikin.edu

North Central College
30 N. Brainard St., Naperville, IL 60540
northcentralcollege.edu
Admissions contact: Undergraduate admission
630-637-5800, admissions@noctrl.edu
Jazz contact: Jack Mouse
630-637-5100, jmousedrum@aol.com

Northern Illinois University
School of Music
DeKalb, IL 60115
niu.edu/music
Admissions contact: Brigid Findley Crawford
815-753-1546, bcrawford@niu.edu
Jazz contact: Reggie Thomas
815-753-0643, reggiethomas@niu.edu

North Park University
3225 W. Foster Ave., Box 21,
Chicago, IL 60625-4895
northpark.edu
Primary contact: Rebecca Ryan
773-244-5623, rryan@northpark.edu
Jazz contact: Joe Lill
773-244-5634, jlill@northpark.edu

Northwestern University
Bienen School of Music
70 Arts Circle Dr., Evanston, IL 60208
music.northwestern.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
847-491-3741, ug-admission@northwestern.edu
Jazz contact: Victor Goines
847-491-4786, v-goines@northwestern.edu

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
School of Music
Altgeld Hall, 1000 S. Normal Ave.,
Carbondale, IL 62901
siu.edu
Primary contact: Richard Kelley
618-536-8742, kelley2@siu.edu

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
Dept. of Music
Box 1771 SUIE, Edwardsville, IL 62026
siue.edu/music
Primary contact: Jason A. Swagler
618-650-2355, jswagle@siue.edu

University of Illinois at Chicago
Department of Music
1040 W. Harrison, MC255, Chicago, IL 60607
uic.edu
Primary contact: Jordan Kamps
312-996-2977, jkamps@uic.edu
Jazz contact: Andy Baker
312-996-2368, andybakr@uic.edu

University of Illinois
School of Music
1114 W. Nevada St., Urbana, IL 61801
music.illinois.edu
Admissions contact: Music Admissions
217-244-7899, musicadmissions@illinois.edu
Jazz contact: Chip McNeill
217-333-9703, chipmc@illinois.edu

Western Illinois University
Dept. of Music
122 Browne Hall, #1 Univ. Plaza,
Macomb, IL 61455
wiu.edu/music
Jazz contact: Dr. John Cooper
309-298-2168, jb-cooper@wiu.edu

INDIANA

Ball State University
2000 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN 47306
bsu.edu/music
Primary contact: Ryan Hourigan
765-285-5402, rmhourigan@bsu.edu
Jazz contact: Mark Buselli
765-285-5436, mbuselli@bsu.edu

Butler University
4600 Sunset Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46208
butler.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Penny Dimmick
800-940-6422, pdimmick@butler.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Matt Pivec
317-940-9068, mpivec@butler.edu

DePauw University
School of Music
605 S. College Ave., Greencastle, IN 46135
depauw.edu/music
Admission contact: George Palton
765-658-4118, georgepalton@depauw.edu
Jazz contact: Steve Snyder
765-658-4382, stevensnyder@depauw.edu

Indiana University
Jacobs School of Music
1201 E. 3rd St., Bloomington, IN 47405
music.indiana.edu/jazz
Admissions contact: Espen Jensen
812-855-7998, musicadm@indiana.edu
Jazz contact: Tom Walsh
812-855-4446, tpwalsh@indiana.edu

Purdue University
Bands & Orchestras
712 Third St., West Lafayette, IN 47907
purdue.edu/bands
Jazz contact: Dr. Mo Trout
765-494-9110, mttrout@purdue.edu

University of Evansville
Department of Music
1800 Lincoln Ave., Evansville, IN 47722
evansville.edu/majors/music
Jazz contact: Timothy Zifer
812-488-2878, tz3@evansville.edu

University of Indianapolis
1400 E. Hanna Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46227
music.uindy.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Mark O'Connor
317-788-3385, oconnormj@uindy.edu

Valparaiso University
Department of Music
1709 Chapel Dr., Valparaiso, IN 46383
valpo.edu/music
Jazz contact: Robert Lark
219-464-5454, robert.lark@valpo.edu

IOWA

Clarke University
1550 Clarke Dr., Dubuque, IA 52001
clarke.edu
Primary contact: Amy Dunker
563-588-6515, amy.dunker@clarke.edu

Coe College
1220 First Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
coe.edu
Primary contact: William Carson
319-399-8520, wcarson@coe.edu
Admissions contact: Bob Benson
319-399-8203, rbenson@coe.edu
Jazz contact: Steve Shanley
319-399-8639, sshanley@coe.edu

Indian Hills Community College
525 Grandview Ave., Ottumwa, IA 52501
indianhills.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
641-683-5262, admissions@indianhills.edu
Jazz contact: David Sharp
641-683-5111, x1836, david.sharp@indianhills.edu

Iowa State University
245 Music Hall, Ames, IA 50010
music.iastate.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Jim Bovinette
515-294-2982, trptboy@iastate.edu

Northwestern College
101 7th St. SW, Orange City, IA 51041
nwciowa.edu
Primary contact: Nora Verburg
712-707-7062, nverburg@nwciowa.edu
Admissions contact: Mark Bloemendaal
712-707-7127, markb@nwciowa.edu
Jazz contact: Angela Holt
712-707-7066, angela.holt@nwciowa.edu

The School for Music Vocations at Southwestern Community College
1501 W. Townline St., Creston, IA 50801
swcciowa.edu
Primary contact: Jeremy Fox
641-782-1466, fox@swcciowa.edu

University of Iowa
1006 Voxman Music Building, Iowa City, IA 52242
music.uiowa.edu
Admissions contact: Pauline Wieland Plowman
319-335-1604, pauline-wieland@uiowa.edu
Jazz contact: Curtis Taylor
319-467-4414, curtis-taylor@uiowa.edu

University of Northern Iowa
School of Music
Minnesota St., Cedar Falls, IA 50604
uni.edu/jazzstudies
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
319-273-2281, admissions@uni.edu
Jazz contact: Chris Merz
319-273-3077, chris.merz@uni.edu

KANSAS

Baker University
406 8th St., Baldwin City, KS 66006
bakeru.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Trilla Lyerla
785-594-4500, trilla.lyerla@bakeru.edu

Bethany College
Dept. of Music
335 E. Swensson, Lindsborg, KS 67456
bethanylb.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
785-227-3380 x8113, admissions@bethanylb.edu
Jazz contact: Keith Dodson
785-227-3380 x8334, dodsonkj@bethanylb.edu

Emporia State University
1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, KS 66801
emporia.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
620-341-5465, go2esu@emporia.edu
Jazz contact: Gary Ziek
620-665-6673, gziek@emporia.edu

Hutchinson Community College
1300 N. Plum St., Hutchinson, KS 67501
hutchcc.edu
Jazz contact: Greg Weis
316-665-3442, weisg@hutchcc.edu

Kansas City Kansas Community College
7250 State Ave., Kansas City, KS 66112
kckcc.edu
Jazz contact: Jim Mair
913-288-7149, jmair@kckcc.edu

Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
k-state.edu
Jazz contact: Wayne Goins
785-532-5740, weg@k-state.edu

Pittsburg State University
Music Department
1701 S. Broadway, Pittsburg, KS 66762
pittstate.edu/music
Primary contact: Dr. Susan Marchant
620-235-4467, smarchan@pittstate.edu
Jazz contact: Robert Kehle
620-235-4474, rkehle@pittstate.edu

Sterling College
125 Cooper Rd., Sterling, KS 67579
sterling.edu
Admissions contact: Dennis Dutton
620-278-4275, ddutton@sterling.edu
Jazz contact: Marisa Callan
620-278-4293, mcallan@sterling.edu

University of Kansas
Dept. of Music & Dance
452 Murphy Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045
music.ku.edu
Primary contact: Dan Gailey
785-864-4389, dgailey@ku.edu

Washburn University
1700 SW College, Topeka, KS 66621
washburn.edu/cas/music
Primary contact: Brad Merryman
785-670-1511, bradmerryman@washburn.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
admissions@washburn.edu
Jazz contact: Craig Treinen
785-670-1520, craig.treinen@washburn.edu

Wichita State University
1845 N. Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260
webs.wichita.edu
Primary contact: School of Music
316-978-3103, schoolofmusic@wichita.edu
Jazz contact: William Flynn
316-978-6198, william.flynn@wichita.edu

KENTUCKY

University of the Cumberlands
6178 College Station Dr., Williamsburg, KY 40769
ucumberlands.edu
Primary contact: Jeff Smoak
606-539-4330, jeff.smoak@ucumberlands.edu
Jazz contact: David Threlkeld
606-539-4334, david.threlkeld@ucumberlands.edu

Morehead State University
150 University Blvd., Morehead, KY 40351
moreheadstate.edu/music
Primary contact: DuWayne Dale
606-783-2488, dcdale@moreheadstate.edu
Jazz contact: Glenn Ginn
606-783-2499, g.ginn@moreheadstate.edu

Northern Kentucky University
Louie B. Nunn Dr., Highland Heights, KY 41099
nku.edu
Primary contact: Kimberly Gelbwasser Lazzeri
859-572-1563, gelbwassek1@nku.edu
Jazz contact: William Brian Hogg
859-572-5885, hoggw1@nku.edu

University of Kentucky
School of Music
105 Fine Arts Building, Lexington, KY 40506
finearts.uky.edu
Admissions contact: Dr. Joanne Filkins
859-257-8181, joanne.filkins@uky.edu
Jazz contact: Miles Osland
859-257-8173, miles.osland@uky.com

University of Louisville
School of Music
Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program
105 E. Brandeis Ave., Louisville, KY 40208
louisville.edu/music/jazz
Admissions contact: Laura Angermeier
502-852-1623, laura.angermeier@louisville.edu
Jazz contact: Mike Tracy
502-852-6032, miketracy@louisville.edu

LOUISIANA

Grambling State University
PO Box 4238, Grambling, LA 71245
gram.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
318-247-3811, admissions@gram.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Nikole Roebuck
318-274-2682, roebuckn@gram.edu

Loyola University
Music Dept.
6363 St. Charles Ave., Box 8,
New Orleans, LA 70118
music.loyno.edu
Admissions contact: Kate Massey
504-865-3240, kkmassey@loyno.edu
Jazz contact: Gordon Towell
504-865-2164, gltowell@loyno.edu

McNeese State University
PO Box 93175, Lake Charles, LA 70609
mcneese.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
337-475-5000, admissiondocs@mcneese.edu
Jazz contact: McNeese Jazz Band
337-475-5004, tpardue@mcneese.edu

Southern University and A&M College
Music Department
PO Box 10215, Baton Rouge, LA 70813
subr.edu
Admissions contact: Dr. Cynthia Downing Bryant
225-771-5384, cynthia_bryant@subr.edu
Jazz contact: Herman Jackson
225-771-3305, herman_jackson@subr.edu

Tulane University
Newcomb Department of Music
102 Dixon Hall, New Orleans, LA 70118
liberalarts.tulane.edu/departments/music
504-865-5267, music@tulane.edu

University of New Orleans
Department of Music
2000 Lakeshore Dr., New Orleans, LA 70148
new.uno.edu/academics/colaehd/la/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
888-514-4275, admissions@uno.edu
Jazz contact: Brian Seeger
bseeger1@uno.edu

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
104 East University Ave., Lafayette, LA 70504
music.louisiana.edu
Jazz contact: Garth Alper
337-482-5203, garth@louisiana.edu

MAINE

University of Maine
College of Arts & Humanities
5788 Class of 1944 Hall, Orono, ME 04469
umaine.edu/spa
Jazz contact: Dan Barrett
207-581-1238, dan.barrett@maine.edu

University of Maine at Augusta
College of Arts & Humanities
46 University Dr., Augusta, ME 04330
uma.edu
Primary contact: Anita-Ann Jerosch
207-621-3179, anitaann.jerosch@maine.edu
Admissions contact: Sheri Fraser
207-621-3136, fraser@maine.edu

University of Southern Maine
School of Music
37 College Ave., Gorham, ME 04038
usm.maine.edu/music
Admissions contact: Chris Alden-Kinne
207-780-5265, ckinne@usm.maine.edu
Jazz contact: Chris Oberholtzer
207-780-5126, chris.oberholtzer@usm.maine.edu

MARYLAND

Community College of Baltimore, Catonsville Campus
800 S. Rolling Rd., Catonsville, MD 21228
ccbcmd.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
443-840-4304, ccbcadmissions@ccbcmd.edu

Goucher College
1021 Dulaney Valley Rd., Baltimore, MD 21204
goucher.edu
Admissions contact: Mr. Corky Surbeck
410-337-6100, admissions@goucher.edu
Jazz contact: Kendall Kennison
410-337-6293, kendall.kennison@goucher.edu

Montgomery College
Dept. of Music
51 Mannakee St., Rockville, MD 20850
montgomerycollege.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
240-567-5000, response@montgomerycollege.edu
Jazz contact: Alvin Trask
240-567-7551, alvin.trask@
montgomerycollege.edu

Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University
1 East Mount Vernon Pl., Baltimore, MD 21202
peabody.jhu.edu/jazz
Primary contact: Admissions Office
667-208-6600, admissions@peabody.jhu.edu
Jazz contact: Sean Jones

Towson University
8000 York Rd., Towson, MD 21252
towson.edu
Admissions contact: Mary Ann Criss
410-704-2836, mcriss@towson.edu
Jazz contact: Dave Ballou
410-704-2831, dballou@towson.edu

University of Maryland
School of Music
Clarice Smith Performing Arts
Center, College Park, MD 20742
music.umd.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
301-405-8435, music-admissions@umd.edu
Jazz contact: Tim Powell
301-405-5549, tjpowell@umd.edu

University of Maryland/Baltimore County
1000 Hilltop Cir., Catonsville, MD 21043
umbc.edu/music
Primary contact: Dr. Michael Richards
410-455-3064, emrichards@umbc.edu
Jazz contact: Matt Belzer
410-455-3123, belzer@umbc.edu

MASSACHUSETTS

Amherst College
220 South Pleasant St., Amherst, MA 01002
amherst.edu
Admissions contact: Nancy Ratner
413-542-2089, nkratner@amherst.edu
Jazz contact: Bruce Diehl
413-542-8308, bpdiehl@amherst.edu

Berklee College of Music
1140 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02215
berklee.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
617-747-2222, admissions@berklee.edu

Boston Conservatory at Berklee
8 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02215
bostonconservatory.berklee.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
617-536-6340, conservatoryadmissions@
berklee.edu

Fitchburg State University
160 Pearl St., Fitchburg, MA 01420
fitchburgstate.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Amy McGlothlin
978-665-3513, amcgloth@fitchburgstate.edu

Hampshire College
893 West St., Amherst, MA 01002
hampshire.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
413-559-5471, admissions@hampshire.edu
Jazz contact: Marty Ehrlich
413-549-4600, mehub@hampshire.edu

Harvard University
28 Fernald Dr., Cambridge, MA 02138
music.fas.harvard.edu
Primary contact: Ingrid Monson
617-495-9854, imonson@fas.harvard.edu

Longy School of Music of Bard College
27 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138
longy.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
617-876-0956, admissions@longy.edu
Jazz contact: Eric Hofbauer
ehofbauer@longy.edu

Merrimack College
315 Turnpike St., North Andover, MA 01845
merrimack.edu/academics
Primary contact: Laura Moore Pruett
978-837-3438, pruettl@merrimack.edu

New England Conservatory of Music
290 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02115
necmusic.edu
Jazz contact: Ken Schaphorst
ken.schaphorst@necmusic.edu

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Department of Music & Dance
267 Fine Arts Center, Amherst, MA 01003
umass.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
413-545-0222, mail@admissions.umass.edu
Jazz contact: Jeffrey W. Holmes
413-545-6046, jwholmes@music.umass.edu

University of Massachusetts at Lowell
College of Fine Arts
Durgin Hall, 35 Wilder St., Lowell, MA 01854
uml.edu
Primary contact: Dan Lutz
978-934-3883, daniel_lutz@uml.edu

Westfield State University
Department of Music
577 Western Ave., Westfield, MA 01086
westfield.ma.edu
Admissions contact: Katelyn Shea
413-572-8534, kshea@westfield.ma.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Edward Orgill
413-572-8196, eorgill@westfield.ma.edu

Williams College
880 Main St., Williamstown, MA 01267
music.williams.edu
Admissions contact: Admission Office
413-597-2211, admission@williams.edu
Jazz contact: Andy Jaffe
413-597-2127, ajaffe@williams.edu

Worcester Polytechnical Institute
100 Institute Rd., Worcester, MA 01609
wpi.edu
Jazz contact: Richard Falco
508-831-5794, rfalco@wpi.edu

MICHIGAN

C.S. Mott Community College
1401 E. Court St., Flint, MI 48503
mcc.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
810-762-0315, inquiry@mcc.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Bill Withem
810-232-3505, bill.withem@mcc.edu

Central Michigan University
Music Building, 162 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
cmich.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
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Jazz contact: Rob Smith
989-774-1269, smith2rm@cmich.edu

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grcc.edu
Primary contact: Kevin Dobreff
616-234-4188, kdobreff@grcc.edu

Hope College
127 E. 12th St., Holland, MI 49423
hope.edu
Jazz contact: Gabe Southard
616-395-7646, southard@hope.edu

Michigan State University
College of Music
333 W. Circle Dr., East Lansing, MI 48824-1043
music.msu.edu
Admissions contact: Benjamin Ebener
517-432-4373, ebener@msu.edu
Jazz contact: Rodney Whitaker
517-432-2194, whitak22@msu.edu

Oakland University
Department of Music Theatre and Dance
302 Varner, Rochester, MI 48309
oakland.edu/smtd
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
248-370-3360, visit@oakland.edu
Primary contact: Deborah VanderLinde
248-370-3022, vanderlinde@oakland.edu

University of Michigan
School of Music, Theatre and Dance
1100 Baits Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2085
music.umich.edu
Admissions contact: Laura Hoffman
734-763-5112, smtd.admissions@umich.edu
Jazz contact: Andrew Bishop
734-764-0596, abish@umich.edu

Wayne State University
Department of Music
4841 Cass Ave., Suite 1321, Detroit, MI 48202
music.wayne.edu
Primary contact: Norah Duncan IV
313-577-1775, norah.duncan@wayne.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
313-577-2424, studentservice@wayne.edu
Jazz contact: Christopher Collins
313-577-1795, ac4080@wayne.edu

Western Michigan University
1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008
wmich.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
269-387-2000
Jazz contact: Andrew Rathbun
269-387-4693, andrew.rathbun@wmich.edu

MINNESOTA

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
1700 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987
smumn.edu
Admissions contact: JoAnn Frahm
507-457-1700, jfrahm@smumn.edu
Primary contact: Ned Kirk
507-457-1513, nkirk@smumn.edu

St. Olaf College
1520 St. Olaf Ave., Northfield, MN 55057
stolaf.edu
Admissions contact: Molly Boes Ganza
507-786-3297, boes1@stolaf.edu
Jazz contact: JC Sanford
507-786-3211, sanfor4@stolaf.edu

University of Minnesota – Duluth
1201 Ordean Ct., Duluth, MN 55812
d.umn.edu/music
Admissions contact: Kathy Neff
218-726-7090, kneff@d.umn.edu

University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
Music Dept.
2106 4th St., Minneapolis, MN 55455
cla.umn.edu/music
Jazz contact: Dean Sorenson
612-624-2334, soren048@umn.edu

MISSISSIPPI

Alcorn State University
1000 ASU Drive #29, Alcorn State, MS 39096
alcorn.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. David C. Miller
601-877-6602, millerd@alcorn.edu

Jackson State University
Dept. of Music
PO Box 17055, Jackson, MS 39217
jsums.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Russell Thomas, Jr.
601-979-2574, russell.thomas@jsums.edu

MISSOURI

St. Charles County Community College
4601 Mid Rivers Mall Dr., St. Peters, MO 63376
stchas.edu
Admissions contact: Barbara Stratman
636-922-8446, bstratman@stchas.edu
Jazz contact: Becky Thorn
636-922-8399, bthorn@stchas.edu

University of Central Missouri
Dept. of Music
108 W. South St., Warrensburg, MO 64093
ucmo.edu/music
Jazz contact: David Aaberg
660-543-4909, aaberg@ucmo.edu

University of Missouri – Kansas City
Conservatory of Music and Dance
4949 Cherry St., Kansas City, MO 64110
conservatory.umkc.edu
Admissions contact: Alice Arredondo
816-235-2900, cadmissions@umkc.edu
Jazz contact: Marcus Lewis
816-235-2905, lewismar@umkc.edu

University of Missouri
School of Music
135 Fine Arts Building, Columbia, MO 65211
music.missouri.edu/ensemble/jazz
Primary contact: School of Music
573-882-2604, music@missouri.edu
Jazz contact: Sam Griffith
griffithsv@missouri.edu

University of Missouri – St. Louis
One University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121
umsl.edu
Jazz contact: Jim Widner
314-516-4235, widnerjl@umsl.edu

Webster University
470 E. Lockwood Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63119
webster.edu/music
Primary contact: Dr. Jeffrey Carter
314-968-7033, jeffreycarter67@webster.edu
Admissions contact: Jacob Lassetter
314-968-5939, jacoblassetter97@webster.edu
Jazz contact: Paul DeMarinis
314-968-7039, demaripa@webster.edu

MONTANA

University of Montana
Music Department
32 Campus Dr., Missoula, MT 59812
umt.edu/music
Primary contact: UM School of Music
406-243-6880, griz.music@umontana.edu
Jazz contact: Rob Tapper
406-243-6880, robert.tapper@umontana.edu

NEBRASKA

Northeast Community College
801 East Benjamin, Norfolk, NE 68702
northeast.edu
Jazz contact: Kevin McLouth
402-844-7355, kevinm@northeast.edu

University of Nebraska at Lincoln
Glenn Korff School of Music
1104 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0100
music.unl.edu/jazzstudies/jazz-studies
Jazz contact: Paul Haar
402-472-5672, phaar2@unl.edu

University of Nebraska at Omaha
Dept. of Music
6001 Dodge St., Omaha, NE 68182
music.unomaha.edu
Jazz contact: Pete Madsen
402-554-2297, petermadsen@unomaha.edu

NEVADA

College of Southern Nevada
3200 E. Cheyenne Ave., N. Las Vegas, NV 89030
csn.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
702-651-5555
Jazz contact: Mark Wherry
702-651-4529

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 South Maryland Pkwy., Las Vegas, NV 89154
unlv.edu
Jazz contact: David Loeb
702-895-3739, dave.loeb@unlv.edu

University of Nevada, Reno
Department of Music/226
1664 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89557
unr.edu/music
Primary contact: Dmitri Atapine
775-682-9034, datapine@unr.edu
Jazz contact: Peter Epstein
775-784-4061, pepstein@unr.edu

NEW HAMPSHIRE

University of New Hampshire
Music Department
30 Academic Way, Durham, NH 03824
unh.edu
Admissions contact: Music Department
603-862-2404, music.info@unh.edu
Jazz contact: Nathan Jorgensen
603-862-2404, nathan.jorgensen@unh.edu

NEW JERSEY

Montclair State University
Cali School of Music
1 Normal Ave., Montclair, NJ 07043
montclair.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
973-655-7610, musauditions@montclair.edu
Jazz contact: Oscar Perez
perezo@montclair.edu

New Jersey City University
Dept. of Music
2039 Kennedy Blvd., Jersey City, NJ 07305
njcu.edu/mdt
Jazz contact: Allen Farnham
201-200-3151, afarnham1@njcu.edu

Princeton University
Department of Music
Woolworth Center of Musical
Studies, Princeton, NJ 08544
music.princeton.edu
Admissions contact: Greg Smith
609-258-6078, gsmith@princeton.edu
Jazz contact: Rudresh Mahanthappa
609-258-2219, rudreshm@princeton.edu

Rowan University
201 Mullica Hill Rd., Glassboro, NJ 08028
rowan.edu
Admissions contact: Charissa Burgos
856-256-4214, charissa@admissions.rowan.edu
Jazz contact: Denis DiBlasio
856-256-4500 x53528, diblasio@rowan.edu

Rutgers University
Mason Gross School of the
Arts, Music Department
81 George St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901
masongross.rutgers.edu
Primary contact: Peggy Barbarite
848-932-9190, pbarbarite@mgsa.rutgers.edu
Jazz contact: Marc Stasio
848-932-1894, marc.stasio@rutgers.edu

William Paterson University
300 Pompton Rd., Wayne, NJ 07470
wpunj.edu
Admissions contact: Gideon Forbes
973-720-3466, musicadmissions@wpunj.edu
Jazz contact: David Demsey
973-720-2320, demseyd@wpunj.edu

NEW YORK

Bard College
30 Campus Rd., Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504
music.bard.edu
Primary contact: James Bagwell
845-758-7536
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
845-758-7472, admissions@bard.edu

Brooklyn Conservatory of Music
58 7th Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217
bkcm.org
Primary contact: Admissions Office
718-622-3300, info@bkcm.org

City College of the City University of New York
Music Dept.
138th St. & Convent Ave., New York, NY 10031
ccny.cuny.edu
Jazz contact: Steve Wilson
212-650-5411, swilson2@ccny.cuny.edu

Colgate University
13 Oak Dr., Hamilton, NY 13346
colgate.edu
Jazz contact: Glenn Cashman
315-228-6688, gcashman@colgate.edu

College of Saint Rose
432 Western Ave., Albany, NY 12203
strose.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
518-454-5150, admit@strose.edu
Jazz contact: Paul Evoskevich
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brooklyn.cuny.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
718-951-5001, grads@brooklyn.cuny.edu
Jazz contact: Jeffrey Taylor
718-951-5000 x1177, jtaylor@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Cornell University
101 Lincoln Hall, 256 East Ave., Ithaca, NY 14853
jazz.arts.cornell.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
607-255-5241, admissions@cornell.edu
Jazz contact: Paul Merrill
607-255-4097, musicatcornell@gmail.com

The Eastman School of Music
University of Rochester
26 Gibbs St., Rochester, NY 14604
esm.rochester.edu/jazz
Admissions contact: Dr. Matthew Ardizzone
585-274-1060, admissions@esm.rochester.edu
Jazz contact: Jeff Campbell
585-274-1433, jcampbell@esm.rochester.edu

Five Towns College
305 N. Service Rd., Dix Hills, NY 11746
ftc.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
631-656-2110, admissions@ftc.edu
Jazz contact: Jill Miller-Thorn
631-656-2110, jill.millerthorn@ftc.edu

Fredonia College (SUNY)
280 Central Ave., Fredonia, NY 14063
fredonia.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
800-252-1212, admissions@fredonia.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Nick Weiser
716-673-4640, nick.weiser@fredonia.edu

Hunter College (CUNY)
Department of Music
695 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021
hunter.cuny.edu/~music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
212-772-4490, admissions@hunter.cuny.edu
Jazz contact: Ryan Keberle
212-396-6256, ryan@ryankeberle.com

Ithaca College
School of Music
3322 Whalen Center for Music, Ithaca, NY 14850
ithaca.edu/academics/school-music
Admissions contact: Townsend Plant
607-274-3366, tplant@ithaca.edu
Jazz contact: Mike Titlebaum
607-274-1283, mtitlebaum@ithaca.edu

The Juilliard School
60 Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY 10023
juilliard.edu
Primary contact: Adam Meyer
212-799-5000, admissions@juilliard.edu

Lehman College (CUNY)
250 Bedford Park West, Bronx, NY 10468
lehman.edu
Primary contact: Janette Tilley
718-960-7112, janette.tilley@lehman.cuny.edu

Long Island University (LIU) Brooklyn
1 University Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201
liu.edu/brooklyn/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
718-488-1011, bkln-enroll@liu.edu
Jazz contact: Samuel Newsome
718-488-1051, sam.newsome@liu.edu

LIU Post
Department of Music
720 Northern Blvd., Brookville, NY 11548
liu.edu/post
Primary contact: Steven Breese
516-299-2475, post-cacd@LIU.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
516-299-2900, post-enroll@liu.edu

Manhattan School of Music
120 Claremont Ave., New York, NY 10027
msmnyc.edu
Jazz contact: Ingrid Jensen
917-749-2802, ijensen@msmnyc.edu

Metropolitan College of New York
60 West St., New York, NY 10006
mcny.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
212-343-1234, admissions@mcny.edu

Music Conservatory of Westchester
216 Central Ave., White Plains, NY 10606
musicconservatory.org
Primary contact: Dr. Douglas Bish
914-761-3900, doug@musiced.org

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newschool.edu/jazz
Primary contact: Admissions Office
212-229-5150, performingarts@newschool.edu

New York University
Steinhardt School
35 West 4th St., Suite 1077, New York, NY 10012
steinhardt.nyu.edu
Admissions contact: John Myers
212-998-5010, john.myers@nyu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. David Pietro
212-998-5252, dap224@nyu.edu

Orange County Community College
115 South St., Middletown, NY 10940
sunyorange.edu
Jazz contact: Chris Parker
845-341-4030, cparker@sunyorange.edu

Purchase College (SUNY)
735 Anderson Hill Rd., Purchase, NY 10577
purchase.edu
Primary contact: Beatriz Martin-Ruiz
914-251-6700, beatriz.martin-ruiz@purchase.edu
Admissions contact: Caitlin Read
914-251-6346, admissions@purchase.edu
Jazz contact: Pete Malinverni
914-251-4455, peter.malinverni@purchase.edu

Queens College (CUNY)
Aaron Copland School of Music
65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, NY 11367
qc.cuny.edu
Admissions contact: Mario Caruso
718-997-5600, admissions@qc.cuny.edu
Jazz contact: Michael Mossman
718-997-3823, michael.mossman@qc.cuny.edu

Roberts Wesleyan College
2301 Westside Dr., Rochester, NY 14624
roberts.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
585-594-6400, admissions@roberts.edu

SUNY Binghamton
Music Dept.
4400 Vestal Parkway East, Binghamton, NY 13902
binghamton.edu/music
Primary contact: Admissions Office
607-777-2171, admit@binghamton.edu

SUNY Oneonta
108 Ravine Pkwy., Oneonta, NY 13820
suny.oneonta.edu
Admissions contact: Karen Brown
607-436-2524, admissions@oneonta.edu
Primary contact: Moira Rouggly
moira.rouggly@oneonta.edu

Syracuse University
Setnor School of Music
200 Crouse College, Syracuse, NY 13244
vpa.syr.edu/academics/music
Admissions contact: Bradley Ethington
315-443-2194, bpething@syr.edu
Jazz contact: John Coggiola
315-443-5896, jccoggio@syr.edu

NORTH CAROLINA

Brevard College
400 N. Broad St., Brevard, NC 28712
brevard.edu
Primary contact: David Gresham
828-884-8139, greshada@brevard.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
828-884-8332, admissions@brevard.edu

Davidson College
Music Department
PO Box 7131, Davidson, NC 28035
davidson.edu
Jazz contact: Patrick Brown
pabrown@davidson.edu

Duke University
105 Mary Duke Biddle Music Building, Durham, NC 27708
music.duke.edu/ensembles
Jazz contact: John Brown
919-660-3385, jbrown@duke.edu

East Carolina University
School of Music
102 A.J. Fletcher Music Center, Greenville, NC 27858
ecu.edu/music/jazz
Admissions contact: Judy Barber
252-328-4281, barberju@ecu.edu

Jazz contact: Dr. Jeff Bair
252-328-1254, bairj@ecu.edu

Elon University
Music Dept.
Campus Box 2800, Elon, NC 27244
elon.edu/music
Admissions contact: Kimberly Rippy
336-278-5600, krippy@elon.edu
Jazz contact: Thomas Erdmann
336-278-5686, erdmann@elon.edu

Mars Hill University
100 Athletic St., Mars Hill, NC 28754
mhu.edu
Primary contact: Rodney Caldwell
828-689-1431, rhcaldwell@mhu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Jim Sparrow
828-689-1433, jsparrow@mhu.edu

North Carolina Central University
1801 Fayetteville St., Durham, NC 27707
nccu.edu/jazz/index.cfm
Contact: Lenora Z. Helm
919-530-6653, lhelm@nccu.edu

North Carolina School for the Arts
1533 S. Main St., Winston-Salem, NC 27127
uncsa.edu
Admissions contact: Brian Cole
336-770-3255, music@ncarts.edu
Jazz contact: Ronald Rudkin
336-770-3356, rudkinr@ncarts.edu

University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights, Asheville, NC 28804-8510
unca.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. William Bares
828-250-2312, wbares@unca.edu

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Department of Music
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
music.unc.edu
Admissions contact: Jeffrey Fuchs
919-962-5695, jfuchs@email.unc.edu
Jazz contact: Stephen Anderson
919-962-1039, anderssr@email.unc.edu

University of North Carolina at Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 29223
uncc.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Will Campbell
704-687-0247, will.campbell@uncc.edu

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402
jazz.uncg.edu
Admissions contact: Sandra Barinowski
336-334-5581, srbarino@uncg.edu
Jazz contact: Steve Haines
336-256-0105, sjhaines@uncg.edu

University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Music Department
1 University Dr., Pembroke, NC 28372
uncp.edu/music
Primary contact: Timothy Altman
910-521-6230, tim.altman@uncp.edu
Admissions contact: Department of Music
910-521-6230, music@uncp.edu
Jazz contact: Professor Aaron Vandermeer
910-521-6310, aaron.vandermeer@uncp.edu

University of North Carolina at Wilmington
Department of Music
601 South College Rd., Wilmington, NC 28403
uncw.edu/music
Jazz contact: Frank Bongiorno
910-962-4048, bongiornof@uncw.edu

Wake Forest University
Department of Music
1834 Wake Forest Road, Winston-Salem, NC 27109
music.wfu.edu
Jazz contact: C. Kevin Bowen
336-758-5365, bowenck@wfu.edu

Western Carolina University
Music Department
1 University Way, Cullowhee, NC 28723
wcu.edu
Admissions contact: Will Peebles
828-227-3258, wpeebles@email.wcu.edu
Jazz contact: Pavel Wlosok
828-227-3261, pwlosok@email.wcu.edu

OHIO

Baldwin Wallace University
Conservatory of Music
275 Eastland Rd., Berea, OH 44017
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Jazz contact: David Bixler
419-372-2953, dbixler@bgsu.edu

Capital University
Conservatory of Music
2199 E. Main St., Columbus, OH 43209
capital.edu
Admissions contact: Summer Slusher
sslusher@capital.edu
Jazz contact: Bob Breithaupt
614-236-6234, rbreitha@capital.edu

Cleveland State University
School of Music
2121 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115
class.csuohio.edu/music
Admissions contact:
Primary contact: John Perrine
216-687-3959, j.m.perrine@csuohio.edu

Cuyahoga Community College
2900 Community College Ave.,
Cleveland, OH 44115
tri-c.edu
Primary contact: Stephen Enos
216-987-4256, stephen.enos@tri-c.edu

Oberlin Conservatory of Music
39 W. College St., Oberlin, OH 44074
oberlin.edu/con
Admissions contact: Conservatory
of Music Admissions
440-775-8413, conservatory.
admissions@oberlin.edu
Jazz contact: Jay Ashby
440-775-6172, jay.ashby@oberlin.edu

Ohio Northern University
535 S. Main St., Ada, OH 45810
onu.edu
Admissions contact: Office of Admissions
419-772-2260, admissions-ug@onu.edu

Ohio State University
School of Music
1866 College Rd., Columbus, OH 43210
music.osu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Shawn Wallace
614-292-2678, wallace.376@osu.edu

Ohio University
School of Music
440 Glidden Hall, Athens, OH 45701
finearts.ohio.edu/music
Admissions contact: Andrew Trachsel
740-593-1670, trachsel@ohio.edu
Jazz contact: Matt James
740-593-0957, jamesm1@ohio.edu

Otterbein University
Department of Music
1 Otterbein College, Westerville, OH 43081
otterbein.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
614-823-1500, uotterb@otterbein.edu
Primary contact: Nicholas Ross
614-823-1020, nross@otterbein.edu

University of Akron
School of Music
302 E. Buchtel Ave., Akron, OH 44325
uakron.edu
Primary contact: School of Music
330-972-7590, music@uakron.edu
Jazz contact: Christopher Coles
cjc72@uakron.edu

University of Cincinnati
College-Conservatory of Music
2600 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45221
ccm.uc.edu/jazz
Admissions contact: Andrea Fitzgerald
513-556-9477, maisonar@ucmail.uc.edu
Jazz contact: Scott Belck
513-556-9447, belcksb@ucmail.uc.edu

University of Dayton
300 College Park, Dayton, OH 45469
udayton.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Willie Morris III
937-229-3994, wmorris1@udayton.edu

University of Toledo
Department of Music
2801 Bancroft St., Toledo, OH 43606
utoledo.edu/comm-arts/music
Admissions contact: Norm Damschroder
419-530-2448, norman.damschroder@utoledo.edu
Jazz contact: Gunnar Mossblad
419-530-4555, gunnar.mossblad@utoledo.edu

Youngstown State University
1 University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555
ysu.edu
Admissions contact: Office of Admissions
330-941-2000, enroll@ysu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Kent J. Engelhardt
330-941-1543, kjengelhardt@ysu.edu

OKLAHOMA

Southwestern Oklahoma University
100 Campus Drive, Weatherford, OK 73096
swosu.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
580-774-3782, admissions@swosu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Richard Tirk
580-774-3772, richard.tirk@swosu.edu

University of Central Oklahoma
School of Music & Jazz Lab
100 North University Dr., Edmond, OK 73034
ucojazzlab.com
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
405-974-2000, igrad@uco.edu
Jazz contact: Brian Gorrell
405-974-5285, bgorrell@uco.edu

University of Oklahoma
School of Music
500 W. Boyd, Norman, OK 73019
ou.edu/finearts/music
Primary contact: Dr. Ronald Barrett
405-325-7883, rcbarrett@ou.edu

OREGON

Mt. Hood Community College
26000 S.E. Stark St., Gresham, OR 97030
mhcc.edu
Jazz contact: Dan Davey
503-491-7010, daniel.davey@mhcc.edu

Portland State University
1825 SW Broadway, Portland, OR 97201
pdx.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
503-725-3511, admissions@pdx.edu
Jazz contact: George Colligan
ghc@pdx.edu

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reed.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
800-547-4750, admission@reed.edu
Primary contact: Mark Burford
503-517-7734, burfordm@reed.edu

University of Oregon
School of Music and Dance, Jazz Studies
1585 E. 13th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403
jazz.uoregon.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
541-346-5268, somdadmit@uoregon.edu
Jazz contact: Toby Koenigsberg
541-346-5653, tobyk@uoregon.edu

Western Oregon University
345 N. Monmouth Ave., Monmouth, OR 97302
wou.edu
Primary contact: Music Department
503-838-8275, music@wou.edu
Jazz contact: Keith Karns
503-838-8541, karnsk@wou.edu

PENNSYLVANIA

Bucknell University
701 Moore Ave., Lewisburg, PA 17837
bucknell.edu/music
Primary contact: Bonnie Smith
570-577-1239, bonnie.smith@bucknell.edu

California University of Pennsylvania
250 University Ave., California, PA 15419
calu.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
724-938-4404, admissions@calu.edu

Curtis Institute of Music
1726 Locust St., Philadelphia, PA 19103
curtis.edu
Admissions contact: Belmary Lorcas
215-717-3167, belmary.lorcas@curtis.edu

Duquesne University
Mary Pappert School of Music
600 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15282
duq.edu/music
Primary contact: Tom Carsecka
412-396-5983, musicadmissions@duq.edu
Jazz contact: Mike Tomaro
412-396-5867, tomarom@duq.edu

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Music Dept.
1011 South Dr., Indiana, PA 15705
iup.edu/music
Primary contact: Admissions Office
724-357-2230
Jazz contact: Kevin Eisensmith
tptprof@iup.edu

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Department of Music
15200 Kutztown Rd., Kutztown, PA 19530
kutztown.edu
Admissions contact: Christine Quinter
610-683-4486, dquinter@kutztown.edu
Jazz contact: Kevin Kjos
610-683-1583, kjos@kutztown.edu

Lehigh University
Music Department
420 East Packer Ave., Bethlehem, PA 18018
lehigh.edu/~inmsc
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
610-758-3100, admissions@lehigh.edu
Jazz contact: Bill Warfield
610-758-5192, wlw2@lehigh.edu

Millersville University
POB 1002, Music Dept., Millersville, PA 17551
millersville.edu
Primary contact: Micheal Houlahan
717-871-7517, micheal.houlahan@millersv.edu

Moravian College
1200 Main St., Bethlehem, PA 18018
moravian.edu/music
Admissions contact: Kim Shank
610-861-1320, shankk@moravian.edu
Jazz contact: Neil Wetzel
610-861-1621, wetzeln@moravian.edu

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
219 Swope Music Hall, Slippery Rock, PA 16057
sru.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
724-738-2015, asktherock@sru.edu

Temple University
Boyer College of Music & Dance
2001 N. 13th St., Philadelphia, PA 19122
temple.edu/boyer
Admissions contact: James Short
215-204-8598, jshort@temple.edu
Jazz contact: Terell Stafford
215-204-8036, terell.stafford@temple.edu

University of Pittsburgh
Department of Music, 110 Music Building, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
music.pitt.edu
Jazz contact: Nicole Mitchell Gantt
412-624-4187, nicolegantt@pitt.edu

University of the Arts
School of Music
250 South Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19102
uarts.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
215-717-6049, admission@uarts.edu
Jazz contact: Chris Farr
856-625-0675, cfarr@uarts.edu

West Chester University
School of Music
700 South High St., West Chester, PA 19383
wcupa.edu
Admissions contact: Dr. John Villella
610-436-3111, jvillella@wcupa.edu
Jazz contact: Peter Paulsen
610-436-2547, ppaulsen@wcupa.edu

RHODE ISLAND

Brown University
Providence, RI 02912
brown.edu
Admissions contact: Office of College Admission
401-863-2378, admission@brown.edu
Jazz contact: Edward Tomassi
401-863-1960, edward_tomassi@brown.edu

Community College of Rhode Island
400 East Ave., Warwick, RI 02886
ccri.edu
Jazz contact: Steve Lajoie
401-825-2112, slajoie@ccri.edu

University of Rhode Island
Music Department
105 Upper College Rd., Kingston, RI 02881
uri.edu
Jazz contact: Joe Parillo
401-874-2431, jparillo@uri.edu

SOUTH CAROLINA

College of Charleston
54 St. Phillips St., Charleston, SC 29424
cofc.edu
Jazz contact: Robert Lewis
843-953-5169, lewisr@cofc.edu

Furman University
Department of Music
3300 Pointsett Hwy., Greenville, SC 29613
furman.edu
Admissions contact: Allyson Brown
864-294-3060, allyson.brown@furman.edu
Jazz contact: Matt Olson
864-294-3284, matt.olson@furman.edu

University of South Carolina
School of Music
813 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29208
music.sc.edu
Admissions contact: Jennifer Jablonski
803-777-6614, jjablonski@mozart.sc.edu
Jazz contact: Craig Butterfield
803-777-4324, cbutterfield@mozart.sc.edu

Upstate University of South Carolina
800 University Way, Spartanburg, SC 29303
uscupstate.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Nolan Stolz
864-503-5263, nstolz@uscupstate.edu

Winthrop University
Department of Music
701 Oakland Ave., Rock Hill, SC 29733
winthrop.edu/music
Admissions contact: Donald Rogers
803-323-2255, rogersd@winthrop.edu
Jazz contact: Tracy Patterson
803-323-4515, pattersont@winthrop.edu

SOUTH DAKOTA

Black Hills State University
1200 University, Spearfish, SD 57799
bhsu.edu
Primary contact: Dr. David Berberick
605-644-2641, david.berberick@bhsu.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions
605-642-6131, admission@bhsu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Christopher Hahn
605-642-6888, christopher.hahn@bhsu.edu

TENNESSEE

Belmont University
1900 Belmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37212
belmont.edu
Primary contact: Keith Mason
615-460-6274, keith.mason@belmont.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Jeff Kirk
615-460-8107, jeff.kirk@belmont.edu

Middle Tennessee State University
1301 E. Main St., Murfreesboro, TN 37132-0002
mtsu.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
615-898-2840, admissions@mtsu.edu
Jazz contact: Jamey Simmons
615-898-2724, james.simmons@mtsu.edu

University of Memphis
Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music
129 Music Building, Memphis, TN 38152
memphis.edu/music
Jazz contact: Jack Cooper
901-678-2547, jcooper1@memphis.edu

University of Tennessee
Natalie L. Haslam School of Music
1741 Volunteer Blvd., Knoxville, TN 37916
music.utk.edu/jazz
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
865-974-1000, music@utk.edu
Jazz contact: Keith Brown
865-974-5927, kbrown15@utk.edu

TEXAS

Amarillo College
PO Box 447, Amarillo, TX 79178
actx.edu/music
Jazz contact: Jim Laughlin
806-371-5340, jelaughlin@actx.edu

Brazosport College
500 College Dr., Lake Jackson, TX 77566
brazosport.edu
Jazz contact: Richard Birk
979-230-3272, richard.birk@brazosport.edu

College of the Mainland
1200 Amburn Rd., Texas City, TX 77591
com.edu
Primary contact: Joyce Palmer
409-933-8348, jpalmer@com.edu
Jazz contact: Sparky Koerner
409-933-8347, skoerner@com.edu

Collin County Community College
2800 E. Spring Creek Pkwy., Plano, TX 75074
collin.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Alex Heitlinger
aheitlinger@collin.edu

Lamar University
PO Box 10044, Beaumont, TX 77710
lamar.edu
Primary contact: Richard Condit
409-880-8146, rcondit@lamar.edu

Saint Mary's University
1 Camino Santa Maria, San Antonio, TX 78228
stmarytx.edu
Jazz contact: Prof. John Rankin
210-436-3421 x1386, jrankin@stmarytx.edu

Stephen F. Austin State University
Dept. of Music
2210 Alumni Dr., Nacogdoches, TX 75962
music.sfasu.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Deb Scott
936-468-1186, dscott@sfasu.edu

Texas A&M University, Kingsville
Music Department
Kingsville, TX 78363
tamuk.edu/music
Jazz contact: Paul Hageman
361-593-2806, paul.hageman@tamuk.edu

Texas Christian University
School of Music
Box 297500, Fort Worth, TX 76129
music.tcu.edu
Admissions contact: Debbie Alenius
817-257-4742, d.alenius@tcu.edu
Jazz contact: Joe Eckert
817-257-5576, j.eckert@tcu.edu

Texas State University
601 University Dr., San Marcos, TX 78666
txstate.edu/jazzstudies
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
512-245-2364, admissions@txstate.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Keith Winking
512-245-3020, kw09@txstate.edu

University of Houston
Moores School of Music
4800 Calhoun Rd., Houston, TX 77204
uhjazz.com
Primary contact: Noe Marmolejo
713-743-3191, nmarmolejo@uh.edu

University of North Texas
Division of Jazz Studies
1155 Union Circle #305040, Denton, TX 76203
jazz.unt.edu
Primary contact: Rob Parton
940-565-3758, robert.parton@unt.edu

University of Texas at Arlington
Music Dept.
Box 19105, Arlington, TX 76019
uta.edu/music
Jazz contact: Tim Ishii
817-272-1205, tishii@uta.edu

University of Texas at Austin
Butler School of Music
110 Inner Campus Dr., Austin, TX 78705
music.utexas.edu
Admissions contact: Sarah Borshard
512-471-0504, uga@mail.music.utexas.edu
Jazz contact: Jeff Hellmer
512-471-0514, jhellmer@austin.utexas.edu

Weatherford College
225 College Park Dr., Weatherford, TX 76086
wc.edu
Jazz contact: Fred Sanders
fsanders@wc.edu

UTAH

Brigham Young University
School of Music
C-550 Harris Fine Arts Ctr., Provo, UT 84602
music.byu.edu
Primary contact: Diane Reich
801-422-8949, diane_reich@byu.edu
Admissions contact: Mark Ammons
801-422-4824, mark_ammons@byu.edu

University of Utah
201 Presidents Cir., Salt Lake City, UT 84112
utah.edu
Jazz contact: John Petrucelli
801-581-7366, john.petrucelli@music.utah.edu

Utah State University
4015 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322
music.usu.edu
Admissions contact: Cary Youmans
435-797-3015, cary.youmans@usu.edu
Jazz contact: Jon Gudmundson
435-797-3003, jon.gudmundson@usu.edu

VERMONT

Bennington College
1 College Dr., Bennington, VT 05201
bennington.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
800-833-6845, admissions@bennington.edu
Jazz contact: Bruce Williamson
802-440-4519, bwilliamson@bennington.edu

Northern Vermont University
337 College Hill, Johnson, VT 05656-9464
northernvermont.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
800-635-1219, admissions@northernvermont.edu

University of Vermont
Southwick Music Complex, Burlington, VT 05405
uvm.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Patricia Julien
802-656-7760, patricia.julien@uvm.edu

VIRGINIA

Christopher Newport University
Department of Music
1 Avenue for the Arts, Newport News, VA 23606
cnu.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
757-594-7025, admit@cnu.edu
Jazz contact: Kelly Rossum
757-594-8812, kelly.rossum@cnu.edu

George Mason University
School of Music
4400 University Dr., MS 3E3, Fairfax, VA 22030
music.gmu.edu/jazz-studies
Primary contact: Dr. Darden Purcell
dpurcel2@gmu.edu

Hampton University
Department of Music
Hampton, VA 23668
hamptonu.edu
Primary contact: Dr. Sheila Maye
757-728-6805, sjmaye@hamptonu.edu

James Madison University
School of Music
800 S. Main St., MSC 7301,
Harrisonburg, VA 22807
jmu.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
540-568-5681, admissions@jmu.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Charles Dotas
dotascj@jmu.edu

Shenandoah Conservatory
1460 University Dr., Winchester, VA 22601
su.edu/conservatory
Jazz contact: Prof. Matt Niess
703-732-2639, mniess@su.edu

University of Richmond
Music Department
Booker Hall, Richmond, VA 23173
richmond.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
804-289-8640, arc@richmond.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Michael Davison
804-289-8281, mdavison@richmond.edu

University of Virginia
McIntire Department of Music
PO Box 400176, Old Cabell Hall,
Charlottesville, VA 22904
virginia.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
434-982-3200, undergradadmission@virginia.edu
Primary contact: Joel Rubin
434-924-6499, joelerubin@virginia.edu

Virginia Commonwealth University
Department of Music
922 Park Ave., Richmond, VA 23284-2004
jazz.vcu.edu
Jazz contact: Prof. Antonio J. Garcia
804-827-0699, ajgarcia@vcu.edu

Virginia Tech
Squires Bldg., Blacksburg, VA 24061
vt.edu
Admissions contact: Barbara Townley
540-231-6195, btownley@vt.edu
Jazz contact: Jason Crafton
540-231-6713, jcrafton@vt.edu

Virginia Union University
1819 Sunnyside Ave., Hopewell, VA 23860
vuu.edu
Primary contact: Admissions Office
804-368-3227, admissions@vuu.edu
Jazz contact: Fayesha L. Cousins
804-257-5810, flcousins@vuu.edu

WASHINGTON

Central Washington University
400 E. University Way, Ellensburg, WA 98926
cwu.edu
Admissions contact: Myndee Ronning
509-963-1211, admissions@cwu.edu
Jazz contact: Vijay Singh
509-963-1566, vijay.singh@cwu.edu

Cornish College of the Arts
1000 Lenora St., Seattle, WA 98121
cornish.edu/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
800-726-ARTS, admission@cornish.edu

Eastern Washington University
526 5th St., Cheney, WA 99004
ewu.edu/music
Admissions contact: Jody Graves
509-359-2241, jgraves@ewu.edu
Jazz contact: Jenny Kellogg
509-359-7421, jkellogg1@ewu.edu

Seattle Central Community College
1701 Broadway, Seattle, WA 98122
seattlecentral.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
206-934-4030, info.central@seattlecolleges.edu
Jazz contact: Brian Kirk
206-934-6338, brian.kirk@seattlecolleges.edu

Shoreline Community College
16106 Greenwood Ave. North, Seattle, WA 98133
shoreline.edu
Admissions contact: Enrollment Services
206-546-4611, enrollmentservices@shore.ctc.edu
Jazz contact: Doug Reid
206-546-4759, dreid@shore.ctc.edu

University of Washington
School of Music
Box 353450, Seattle, WA 98195
music.washington.edu
Primary contact: School of Music
206-543-1201, musinfo@uw.edu
Jazz contact: Cuong Vu
206-543-1201, cuongvu@uw.edu

Washington State University
School of Music
PO Box 645300, Pullman, WA 99164-5300
music.wsu.edu/area-information/jazz-studies
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
360-546-9779, van.admissions@wsu.edu
Jazz contact: Greg Yasinitsky
509-335-4244, yasinits@wsu.edu

Western Washington University
516 High St., Bellingham, WA 98225
wwu.edu
Primary contact: Kevin Woods
360-650-3394, kevin.woods@wwu.edu

Whitworth University
W. 300 Hawthorne, Spokane, WA 99251
whitworth.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Dan Keberle
dkeberle@whitworth.edu

WEST VIRGINIA

Marshall University
1 John Marshall Dr., Huntington, WV 25755
marshall.edu/somt/music/jazz-studies
Admissions contact: Dr. Adam Dalton
304-696-2345, daltona@marshall.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Martin W. Saunders
304-696-4316, saunders35@marshall.edu

Shepherd University
Department of Music & Theatre
301 N. King St., Shepherdstown, WV 25443
shepherd.edu
Admissions contact: Kristen Lorenz
304-876-5212, klorenz@shepherd.edu
Jazz contact: Dr. Kurtis Adams
304-876-5237, kadams02@shepherd.edu

West Virginia University
School of Music
1 Fine Arts Dr., Morgantown, WV 26505
music.wvu.edu
Admissions contact: Jodie Lewis
304-293-4532, jodie.lewis@mail.wvu.edu
Jazz contact: Jared Sims
304-293-4549, jared.sims@mail.wvu.edu

West Virginia Wesleyan College
59 College Ave., Buckhannon, WV 26201
wvwc.edu
Admissions contact: John Waltz
304-473-8518, waltz_j@wvwc.edu

WISCONSIN

Lawrence University
Conservatory of Music
711 E. Boldt Way SPC 29, Appleton, WI 54911
lawrence.edu
Admissions contact: Katie Seidel
920-832-6916, katie.s.seidel@lawrence.edu
Jazz contact: Jose Encarnacion
920-832-6629, jose.l.encarnacion@lawrence.edu

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire
Music Department
121 Water St., Eau Claire, WI 54702
uwec.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
715-836-5415, admissions@uwec.edu
Jazz contact: Robert Baca
715-836-4371, bacarj@uwec.edu

University of Wisconsin – La Crosse
1725 State St., La Crosse, WI 54601
uwlax.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
608-785-8939, admissions@uwlax.edu
Jazz contact: Jeff Erickson
608-785-8414, jerickson@uwlax.edu

University of Wisconsin – Madison
Mead Witter School of Music
455 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706
music.wisc.edu/jazz
Admissions contact: Jared Jellison
608-263-5986, admissions@music.wisc.edu
Jazz contact: Johannes Wallmann
917-992-9101, wallmann@wisc.edu

University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
1209 Fremont St., Stevens Point, WI 54481
uwsp.edu
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
715-346-2441, admiss@uwsp.edu
Jazz contact: Mathew Buchman
715-346-4054, mathew.buchman@uwsp.edu

University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
Music Department
800 West Main, Whitewater, WI 53190
uww.edu/cac/music
Admissions contact: Admissions Office
262-472-1440, uwwadmit@uww.edu
Jazz contact: Matt Sintchak
262-472-5710, sintcham@uww.edu

WYOMING

Casper College
125 College Dr., Casper, WY 82601
caspercollege.edu
Primary contact: Eric Unruh
307-268-2537, unruh@caspercollege.edu

Northwest College
Music Dept.
231 W. 6th St., Powell, WY 82435
nwc.edu/music
Primary contact: Craig Olson
307-754-6475, craig.olson@nwc.edu
Jazz contact: Zach Paris
307-754-6427, zach.paris@nwc.edu

2022-23 Jazz Education Guide ★★★

The 2018 University of Kentucky Jazz Ensemble

College CD Roundup

By Ken Franckling

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

Live @ Caplan 2022

UArts

When campuses went dark at the start of the pandemic, so did the University of the Arts' Caplan Recital Hall in Philadelphia. But after 18 months of online classes and solo practicing, Caplan returned

as a performance magnet for the jazz studies program. This wide-ranging compilation includes material recorded during UArts' 2022 graduate and undergrad spring recital series.

The opener, Wes Montgomery's "Four on Six," is the first of two contributions from the 17-piece Z Big Band. It's a fine feature for guitarist Matt Kahn, underscored by horn-section doubling and counterpoint. The undergraduate ensemble returns later with its take on Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark," featuring trumpeter Ian Livingston's soaring extended horn solo. Rich ensemble passages abound on both tracks, which were arranged by Alan Baylock, who directs the University of North Texas One O'Clock Lab Band.

Livingston's solo chops are also showcased on the session's lone duo piece, a romp through Bud Powell's bebop classic "Celia" that teams the trumpeter with faculty member Tony Micelli on vibes. Ravi Seenarine handles vocals, soprano sax, drums, turntables, and other instruments for his layered take on Jacob Collier's "Do You Feel Love / Outro." This otherworldly sonic adventure blends a variety of textures and moods, with mentor Collier adding prerecorded background vocals.

Pat Metheny's composition "Timeline" showcases Abel Aranda's nimble, thoughtful guitar artistry, which includes both lush and spitfire melodic lines. Pianist Lonell Johnson adds a complementary solo on this quartet piece. Bassist Dan McCain and drummer Jack Judge complete the rhythm section. It sure swings.

Faculty member Dave Allen's teasing composition "Real and Imagined" is an extended feature for alumnus Jonah Christian on guitar, with Seenarine adding a tenor-sax solo. Drummer Satchel Schwartz sets the blistering pace. Singer Lauren Lark brings fellow grad student Aranda and several alumni and UArts former faculty to explore her gritty original "Poly Blues." She's featured on both wordless and lyric vocals that weave through and ride over soloing by Jamal Jones on flugelhorn and Randy Kapralick on trombone.

"Doors Open," composed by faculty member Mark Allen, features the 10-member Transfusion Ensemble. It opens with an extended teasing bass solo from Zach Guise, then builds in intensity. Guitarist Noah Uy and pianist Johnson add a pensive feel leading into alto and tenor sax solos by Robert Rutigliano and Seenarine, respectively. The ensemble horn work by this more contemporary undergrad unit is very fine. The project winds down with a quartet take on Joel Frahm's "Short Rack," a frisky blues feature for alto saxophonist Andrew Harker.

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY JAZZ ENSEMBLE 1

I Can See the Other Side

Self-released

The Ball State jazz studies program's debut recording showcases the Muncie, Indiana school's premier big band as it digs into four original compositions, a student arrangement of a Hoagy Carmichael classic, and one faculty contribution from pianist Scott Routenberg. The session opens with the pandemic- and tropical hurricane-inspired "Tempest."

Diego Balseca's tenor sets the stormy tone, composer Alex Kastner's trumpet raises the intensity, and percussionist Ben Davis adds the subtle shading of an ocean drum. Charles Platz's throbbing bass line sets up and closes out this uptempo piece.

Trombonist Peter Lehmann's sprightly arrangement of Carmichael's "Up a

MARK CORNELISON

Lazy River" features joyful, teasing sectional interplay and counterpoint inspired by the masterful arranging style of the late Sammy Nestico. Bassist Platz, Theo Garcia on flugelhorn, and the tandem flutes of Alyssa Santiváñez and Kevin Dong get spotlights. The flutists return to add some color to the closing track.

Aron Scott Callard's poignant ballad "Miss Serenity" is an extended feature for alto saxophonist Anthony Echarry, whose plaintive sound here is reminiscent of Johnny Hodges. Drummer Anthony Schaff shifts to vibes, with teasing piano work from Jacob Smith and some French horn cushion from Corrine Edom and Cory Kirby.

Errol Zlovic is featured on Hammond B-3 for his funky, horn-rich, *Pink Panther*-ish piece "Struttin'," with complementary solos from trombonist Callard and alto saxophonist Vince Malan. Tenor saxophonist Trevor Mather, who's not in the band, contributed the uptempo gem "Late Nights," on which the horn sections and soloists ride Platz's solid walking bass from start to rousing finish. Smith on piano, Balseca on tenor sax, and Garcia on trumpet turn in memorable solos leading up to guitarist Charles Platz's cameo.

This session, produced by jazz studies director and band director Mark Buselli, closes with faculty colleague Routenberg's through-composed title track. Routenberg said he wrote the piece to honor the January 20, 2021 inauguration of President Joe Biden, completing it on Inauguration Day. Its varied segments explore the wide-ranging moods of hope, dissonance, and ambiguity, the latter flavored by Davis' piano segment after several intense ensemble horn sections. Through music, it manages to mirror the political chaos and divided nature of the United States that has extended beyond the change in administration. It was a challenge that seems almost prophetic, and it succeeds.

BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

12th Berklee Global Jazz Institute Summit: A Tribute to Chick Corea and Ralph Peterson

YouTube

This 12th annual edition of the Berklee Global Jazz Institute Summit, a virtual concert thanks to the pandemic, explored a wide range of compositions by two jazz greats that we lost last year: pianist Chick Corea and drummer Ralph Peterson Jr., the latter a Berklee faculty member since 2003. The 87-minute program features five of the Institute's graduate ensembles before concluding with two different faculty quintets.

The arrangements of these various Berklee bands are artful and imaginative. Chicago-born trumpeter Emiel De Jaegher

is spotlighted on the uptempo opening quartet segment by BGJI's Grey Ensemble on Corea's "Humpty Dumpty" and Peterson's "Art of War." The Amber Ensemble, a guitar/bass/drums trio, performs Corea's "Tones for Joan's Bones" and Peterson's "Keep it Simple," with faculty member Nadia Washington adding vocals and acoustic guitar on the latter tune, a breezy mantra that features Sebastian Fuentes on electric guitar, Liany Mateo on bass, and Lily Finnegan on drums.

BGJI's Purple Ensemble, joined by faculty guest Patricia Zarate Pérez on alto sax, contrasts moods on Peterson's hard-driving "Freight Train" and Corea's gentle "Sicily." This two-bass quintet includes Noam Tanzer on acoustic and Ciara Moser on electric, Anastassiya Petrova on piano, drummer Ricardo Guerra, and singer Davide Cerreta, who adds wordless vocals to "Freight Train" and Italian-then-English lyrics on "Sicily." The Silver Ensemble, a guitar quartet, is joined by faculty member Rick Di Muzio on tenor sax for Peterson's "Impervious Gems" and "Love Castle," a classic that Corea had recorded as a duo with vibraphonist and longtime Berklee dean Gary Burton. This segment features wonderful interplay between guitarist Paride Pignotti and bassist Paul Pandit.

A Zoom segment by the Maroon Ensemble handles two Corea gems: "Armando's Rumba" and "Spain," the latter featuring keyboardist Suwon Yim, faculty member Bertram Lehmann on percussion, and a mix of wordless and Spanish-language vocals from student Mar Fayos. It is both exotic and intimate. The BGJI Faculty Ensemble (Allan Chase on baritone and alto sax, Marco Pignataro on tenor and soprano sax, pianist Chase Morrin, bassist Bruno Raberg, and drummer Lehmann) digs deep into Peterson's poignant "Portrait of Lord Willis" and Corea's fiery "What Was."

The tribute concludes with the Artists-in-Residence Ensemble (saxophonists Joe Lovano and George Garzone, BGJI founder Danilo Pérez on piano, bassist John Patitucci, and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington). This all-star unit explores Peterson's "Dream Deferred" and Corea's "Quartet No. 2, Part II (Dedicated to John Coltrane)." There's a freewheeling vibe that shifts from player to player, with a particular creative lock between longtime Wayne Shorter bandmates Pérez and Patitucci. Nobody holds back here.

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY JAZZ ENSEMBLE

The Early Years... ...'Til Now

Mark Masters

These two compilations, released in 2019, celebrated two milestones for the University of Kentucky's Mega-Sax

jazz ensembles: 50 years since the first band was formed, and 30 years since reed player Miles Osland became program director. These big bands are robust in their instrumentation and put a fine spin on things, whether refreshing the classics or digging into newer material.

The Early Years... includes two or three tracks apiece from five different Wildcats bands recorded between 1979 and 1995. The 1979 band's take on Thelonious Monk's "Well You Needn't" is a joyous romp that encourages biting horn solos from the saxophonists and teasing ensemble segments that lead into Steve Walters' tasty trumpet solo. Tom Garvin's "Quiet Lady" is a breezy gem showcasing the ensemble horn lines. The 1989 edition of Mega-Sax is featured on two tracks: the Matt Harris composition "Harco Shuffle," a spotlight for the range and ideas of trumpeter Pete Bellino, and Bob Mintzer's Latin-tinged big-band classic "In the Eighties," which features pianist Bob Boguslaw.

The material from 1991 includes Paul Ferguson's "Buckeye Blues" and Mintzer's challenging Elvin Jones homage "Elvin's Mambo," which both feature trombonist David Henderson. Trumpeter Todd Hastings adds complementary heated solos on the mambo. The 1992 band, with some overlapping personnel from the prior year, is featured on trumpeter David Hummel's teasing arrangement of the Duke Ellington chestnut "I'm Beginning to See the Light," and low-brass player and composer Norlan Bewley's spirited "Hightop."

The 1995 ensemble updates three jazz classics: Johnny Hodges' "Jeep's Blues" and Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan," with shimmering solos from alto sax player John Richardson, and a plaintive Tom Kubis arrangement of Woody Herman's theme song "Early Autumn" that features tenor saxophonist Brian Murray. *The Early Years...* closes with the 1991 band's "Cruisin' for a Bluesin'." This version of the Andy Weiner-penned Maynard Ferguson staple features two faculty soloists, Osland on alto sax and former program director Vince DiMartino on trumpet. With the big band's fine cushion, they sure wail here.

The 2-CD compilation *...'Til Now* includes between one and seven tracks apiece from U of K Jazz Ensembles recorded in 1998, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2017, and 2019. This material mostly draws from

more contemporary big-band composers; two vintage pieces from Duke Ellington and Frank Foster are included for good measure.

The 1998 band gets things started with Don Menza's gentle swinger "Blues for Uncommon Kids," ensemble member Bryan Murray's robust "Red Reflection," Bob Florence's "Tenors, Anyone?" (both featuring tenor saxophonists Murray and Corey Lareau), Bill Holman's "No Joy in Mudville," and the Americana classic "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Osland joins the fun on the latter tune on soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxes.

The 2004 edition tackles saxophonist Mike Tomaro's gentle ballad "A Sideward Glance," featuring Rudy Brannon on alto sax; Gordon Goodwin's "Mama Llama Samba"; three Astor Piazzolla pieces—"Michelangelo," "Tres Minutos Con Realidad" and the exotic "Libertango"—all arranged by Fred Sturm (with Osland guesting on flute on "Libertango"); trombonist Nick Lane's high-flying "Take That!," revealing trumpeter T.J. Tesh's firepower; and Alan Baylock's "Two Seconds to Midnight." The 2009 band is featured on one piece, "There and Back,"

from its recording *GO! The Music of Bob Mintzer*. The composer, a guest artist that year, is featured with baritone sax player Joe Carucci. The 2014 Mega-Sax edition tackles Raleigh Dailey's mixed-mood gem "Spook Country" and Mike Mower's funky, South African township-flavored "The Easter Islander."

The 2017 band's contributions include Weiner's blistering "When Ya Gotta Go, Ya Gotta Go!," powered by drummer Nick Bolcholz and highlighted by Jonathan Barrett and Angie Ortega's dueling tenor sax solos; Russell Ferrante's "Goin' Home," featuring arranger Ian Cruz on EWI; and composer/arranger Matt Catingub's playfully titled "Blues and the Abscessed Tooth," an uptempo showcase for pianist Coty Taylor and the interplay of trombonists Brad Myers and Denver Pascua. The 2017 edition is also featured on the Ellington band classic "Caravan," with Ortega featured on dusky vocals and Cruz shifting to clarinet; a gently swinging take on Foster's early-1960s piece "Blues in Hoss' Flat" that spotlights Pascua's trombone artistry; and Goodwin's "The Phat Pack," with its intricate saxophone lines.

...'Til Now winds down with four tracks from the 2019 big band. They include a Goodwin arrangement of film, television, and game composer Michael Giacchino's "The Incredibles" featuring guitarist Alan Robinson's incendiary lines; Dailey's gently loping "Gratitude," which showcases trombonist Michael DeSousa; and L.A. bandleader Dave Slonaker's "Duelity," highlighted by an extended horn duel between trumpeter David Vest and alto saxophonist Kirby Davis that rides over the band's layered cushion. The final track, saxophonist Rick Hirsch's Japanese-flavored "Miles' Big Band Dojo," features guest artists Dailey on piano, Osland on flute, and DiMartino on trumpet.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The Frost Septet ... With Special Guest Gonzalo Rubalcaba

Frost

STAMPS JAZZ QUINTET

Blue Paint

artistShare

These recordings showcase two of the Frost School of Music's top midsize jazz ensembles performing finely honed original music, one of them sneaking in a student arrangement of a modern-day Joey Calderazzo gem with a jazz-standard quality.

The 2020 Frost Septet consisted of graduate students and undergraduate seniors. This CD includes four studio tracks by the septet; the other

five are from a live concert with guest artist Gonzalo Rubalcaba (the Cuban-born pianist has been a Frost School lecturer since 2015).

The opener, trombonist Eli Feingold's "The Trash Stashing Cat," is an exuberant, energetic feature for guitarist Jordan Rattner, Feingold, and alto saxophonist Adam Claussen. Rattner's sweet ballad "A Year and a Glow" literally glows with his pristine guitar work, then an ensemble segment sets up brief complementary solos from trumpeter Erin Mutchler and vibraphonist Mackenzie Karbon. Karbon's mid-tempo "Song for Irving's Lemon Tree" is a complex composition that alternates a variety of interplay snippets within the

group—bass and guitar, then the three horns, then vibes and horns. The band rides drummer Victor Valdes' march beat on Claussen's robust "Autumnal March," and weaving solo lines set up Claussen's strutting solo.

The in-concert segment starts with bassist Marty Quinn's ballad "Cady," a vibes, guitar and trumpet showcase. Valdes arranged the lone non-original, Calderazzo's energetic Latin-flavored "The Mighty Sword," for the septet. The composer's catchy three-note hook is the thread between all of the soloists. Rubalcaba's thundering, multifaceted solo sets up responses from Rattner, Karbon, and Valdes.

In concert, the band revisits "A Year and a Glow" and "The Trash Stashing Cat." These bolder extended versions reveal Rubalcaba's impact in lighting a fire under the other players. On "A Year and a Glow," he sets the tone with his lengthy introduction; interplay with Rattner, Claussen, and Mutchler; and comping beneath the ensemble horn lines. The concert version of "The Trash Stashing Cat" features Rubalcaba over Quinn's bass propulsion before Feingold and Claussen deliver passionate, full-range solos. Rubalcaba adds even more intensity on the way out. The dreamy closing track, "Now and Then," is an introspective feature for composer Mutchler on flugelhorn and Rubalcaba.

Blue Paint features original compositions by the members of the Stamps Quintet's class of 2021. The group is named for the Stamps Family Foundation, which funds Frost's distinguished ensemble program and gives scholarships to its students. Five top young players are selected every four years for this group, which became a working jazz quintet in the fall of 2017. This edition included trombonist Jered Byford, drummer Marcello Carelli, bassist Max Schwartz, trumpeter David Sneider, and guitarist Tim Watson. Familiarity may breed contempt in some circles, but in this case it bred a stunning degree of creativity and instrumental artistry. These players shift with ease between comping, soloing, and ensemble work.

The title track features Watson, composer Sneider, and Carelli, as well as some shimmering ensemble horn segments. Breezy at times, it's a solid introduction to the quintet's tightness. Watson's "Somersault" is a darker feature for Byford's trombone, answered by the composer's contrasting bright guitar sound and Sneider's upbeat trumpet reprise of the melody. Carelli's funky and teasing "Tangled" rides Watson's chordal thread between solos and call-and-response segments. Byford's "Soarin'" has a sprightly Jazz Messengers feel, highlighted by frisky trumpet, trombone and guitar solos, while his "To Come" is more wistful, the horns blending into a darker sound that set up beautiful, pensive guitar and trumpet showcases.

Watson's second composition, "Introversion," is a clever piece that opens with teasing melodic lines and counterpoint that involve the full band, leading into intensifying guitar and trombone segments. Byford's propulsive "18" is a fine ensemble display. The piano-less quintet shifts gears a bit on Sneider's exotic "It Catches Up" by adding a pianist, guest artist Shelly Berg, to the mix; he's been dean of the Frost School of Music since 2007. Sneider's thoughtful horn solo and Berg's dynamic keyboard response are highlights.

Drummer Carelli's "Waltz for a Forgotten Dream" is a gentle mood-setting gem. Watson solos beautifully, then shifts instantly to comping beneath Sneider's dulcet trumpet. "Dusk," bassist Schwartz's contribution, starts edgy and darker, before teasing trumpet and trombone solos create rapid shifts in its free-jazz melodic feel that the band embraces. Sneider's "Quick!" closes the session on a funky note, his trumpet, Watson's biting guitar solo, and Byford's trombone riding atop the ensemble cushion. Everybody gets a taste on this clever piece.

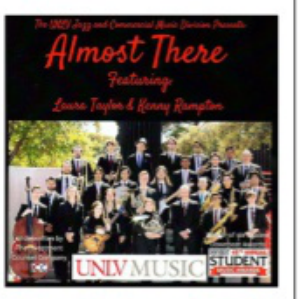
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA-LAS VEGAS JAZZ AND COMMERCIAL MUSIC PROGRAM

Almost There

Vegas

UNLV's 2022 jazz recording spotlights the program's abundance of musical riches. Disc one features the Division of Jazz and Commercial Music's premier big band, Jazz Ensemble 1, and the Joe Williams Scholarship Combo, an honors septet. Disc two showcases three other groups plus a closing track by the Williams honors combo. The imprint from undergraduate and grad students as composers, arrangers, and soloists is deep throughout.

The 10-track big-band segment opens with trumpeter Ricardo Arana's spirited "Abundance," featuring standout solos from pianist Micah Smith and trumpeter Harrison Collard. The



ensemble's take on Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra bassist Carlos Henriquez's "2/3's Adventure" blends its Latin feel with rich section work and a succession of fine solos from pianist Patrick Hogan, saxophonists FJ Rodriguez on alto and Edward Sarabia on tenor, and the high-note artistry of lead trumpeter Kurt Tumbagahan.

Hogan, who graduated in May with a master's degree, is featured on vocals on two originals, the moody "Appassionata" and the teasing gem "You're Gonna Get Me in Trouble." He's back at the piano on "Rockin' in Rhythm," the first of two Duke Ellington classics here. The call-and-response section work is outstanding, as are solos from Hogan, clarinetist Chris Ellis, and the teasing trumpets of

Collard, Dan Foster, and Aries Harper. The band's moodier take on Duke's ballad "Solitude" features Max Marquis on baritone sax and arranger Molly Redfield on bass. It's a gentle beauty.

UNLV alumnus Kenny Rampton is featured on flugelhorn for guest singer Laura Taylor's wistful original "Spellbound," which was arranged by JE1 co-director Nathan Tanouye. Taylor, a Las Vegas resident for many years, is a longtime supporter of the UNLV jazz program. Alto saxophonist Rodriguez wrote and arranged "Nous Avons Changé," a midtempo swinger that features trombonist Zach Guzman-Mejia, trumpeter Collard, and Amy Crosley on drums and vibes. The big band's robust take on "Suburbia," composed by UNLV alumnus Rachel Eckroth (currently pianist for St. Vincent and Rufus Wainwright), features a searing solo from guitarist Jaren Glick. JE1 concludes with the exquisite title track, another Arana original. It features Smith on piano, Rodriguez on alto sax, and Contemporary Jazz Ensemble member Cole Henriques on EWI.

The Joe Williams Scholarship Combo digs into originals by bassist Keegan Carter ("Destino de la Suerte") and Hogan ("The Eighty Five"), as well as Rodriguez's arrangement of the Los Angeles-based jazz/alternative R&B trio Moonchild's song "Money." All three reveal the tight vibe and interplay of this smaller honors combo. Singer Gary Fowler joins on the soulful Moonchild tune. Hogan's clever "The Eighty Five" has a bop-standard quality. Its ensemble horn lines and solos from Hogan himself, trombonist Kirby Galbraith, Collard, and Rodriguez are right in the pocket.

Disc two of *Almost There* opens with UNLV's Latin Jazz Ensemble. Director Uli Geissendoerfer's Brazilian jazz-inspired "Oh, What a Day" starts gently with Micah Smith's piano introduction, then grad student Lara Vivian Smith's vocal interlude teases its uptempo transition. It burns mightily thanks to Crosley's drumming and Rodriguez's soaring alto solo. Antônio Carlos Jobim's "Dindi," as arranged by Sarabia, is a dreamy vocal feature for Kailyn Richards with gentle support from Kennedy McClendon on guitar and Rodriguez on flute. Late Puerto Rican bandleader Noro Morales' "Maria Cervantes" receives a robust charanga treatment; featuring Crosley on vibes along with violinists Aolani Aguirre and Lauren Cordell, the band celebrates its deep Cuban flavor. The LJE segment finishes with pianist and longtime UNLV faculty member Alex Clements' "Emily's Dream," a playful song inspired by his daughter's free spirit. This destejos, based on Afro-Peruvian rhythms, features Guzman-Mejia on cajon. Percussionist Pepe Jimenez, who co-directed the ensemble, provides the intro, setting up an extended vocal solo from Fowler and a teasing, multi-faceted melodic exploration by the full band.

The Contemporary Jazz Ensemble covers material stretching from R&B to the avant garde. Amanda Ketterer's arrangement of Angela Bofill's "The Only Thing I Would Wish For" is a bouncy celebration featuring the arranger's vocals and soloist interplay by trumpeter Surafeel Tamre, trombonist Galbraith, and flutist Robert Mitchell. Sun Ra's energetic big-band staple "Enlightenment" was arranged by Tamre and pianist Sergio Gamboa. Tenor saxophonist Ian Cruz sets its layered, adventurous tone. Los Angeles-based pianist and bandleader Jacob Mann wrote the funky "Baby Carrots," which Mitchell arranged for this session. He's featured on clarinet with Galbraith on trombone and Aguirre on violin. Kenny Wheeler's rich composition "For Jan," from his eight-movement *The Sweet Time Suite*, features trumpeter Tamre, baritone saxophonist Henriques, and tenor saxophonist Cason Allen. Galbraith arranged this modern big-band adventure.

Studio Scarlet contributed two tracks. "Words," composed by Anders Edenroth from the Swedish a cappella combo the Real Group, showcases the gorgeous harmonies of the full vocal sextet without instrumental support. A rhythm section joins on Horace Silver's "Peace." Soprano Zoe Conrad and tenor Thomas Bradley Calvin are featured soloists on this classic jazz ballad. The Joe Williams Scholarship Combo closes the project with Silver's playfully uptempo "The St. Vitus Dance." Fowler is the featured singer. Robust solos from Rodriguez, Galbraith, Collard, Sarabia, and Hogan follow.

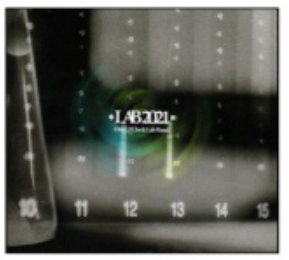
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS ONE O'CLOCK LAB BAND

LAB 2021

North Texas Jazz

With the University of North Texas in the midst of celebrating the 75th year of its storied jazz program, this latest release from its premier ensemble puts a fine stamp on its strongest attributes. They are the undergrad and graduate-level musicians who blend their talents as players, composers, and arrangers, whether digging into their own material or that of other contributors.

LAB 2021 blends a contemporary feel with a robust big-band sensibility. It opens with trumpeter Austin Ford's sprightly arrangement of the Howard Arlen chestnut "It's Only a Paper Moon," featuring South Korean pianist Yeeun Kim and trombonist Jackson Churchill. Master's-degree candidate and graduate assistant



Michael Clement's robust "Evading Karmatics" is the first of four features for guitarist Alex Frondelli, whose biting sound enhances the tune's modernish vibe. He and tenor saxophonist Andrew Larsen ride Michael Baylock's solid bass line and the big-band cushion.

Singer Gabi Date is featured on her original "Phases," arranged by saxophonist and bandmate Chris Bauer. This one explores the various phases of a relationship. The band's interpretation of Michael Abene's "Runaround" celebrates its rich brass ensemble sound, with solos by Ford and tenor saxophonist Daniel Henson. Band director Alan Baylock's arrangement of Joe Zawinul's ballad "A Remark You Made" is a spare beauty. It features three mood-setters: Ian Calhoun on bass trombone; Michael Baylock, the arranger's son, on fretless bass; and Jonathan Shier on flugelhorn. Bauer's teasing original "Jolly Wallop" features him on alto and Frondelli on guitar.

The One O'Clock Lab Band's annual contribution from veteran composition/arranging professor Rich DeRosa is an original called "Wisdom." Its wistful feel is accentuated by the layered horn sections, with solos from trombonist Jack Courtright and alto saxophonist Gus Arnold. North Texas Jazz teaching assistant and master's-degree candidate Ariel Glassman, a guitarist, composer and singer who also leads a Chicago-based big band, wrote the soaring "One of These Things (Doesn't Belong)." Date's wordless vocals weave through it like a long piece of the finest silk thread, offset by intense soloing from Ford on flugelhorn and Henson on tenor.

Bauer's beauty "Above the Clouds" is dominated by playful solos from Joseph Trahan on baritone saxophone. The session winds down with Ford's "Cool Kids." This big-band arrangement's teasing stop-time accents between segments lead into a robust solo from trombonist Trenton Barnes.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Room 118

Oklahoma State University Jazz Studies

This latest project from the OSU Jazz Orchestra is titled to honor a spot that made a big impact on decades of music students and faculty. The big band and other campus music groups used to rehearse and record in Room 118, a.k.a. "the band room," in the Seretean Center for the Performing Arts. That building was replaced in the spring of 2021 by the Michael & Anne Greenwood School of Music's new home, the McKnight Center for the Performing Arts.

The big band, directed by saxophonist Tommy Poole, opens with Toshiko Akiyoshi's "Tuning Up." This hard-driving horn-section feature has standout saxophone solos: first by Matthew Howell on baritone, then by Matthew Floeter and Nathan Brooks on dueling altos. Not to be outdone, Jacob Eyler and Seth Giles follow with a trombone duel.

Bob Mintzer's "Art of the Big Band" gets a strong workout,

particularly from tenor saxophonist Kyle Fisher and pianist Dylan Shadoan, before the band digs into the next Mintzer contribution. His elegant, teasing arrangement of Herbie Hancock's "Dolphin Dance," weaving in and around the melody, features solos from Brooks, trombonist Kyle Hunt, and drummer Ryan DeShazo. Thad Jones' "To You," another big-band standard, is Room 118's most delicate piece, showcasing the ensemble's tight playing, which bolsters solos from Shadoan and Hunt.

Ted Nash's strident "5½ Weeks" is a beautiful addition to the big-band canon. Horn-section interplay sets up fine solos from DeShazo, Floeter, and guitarist Eric Eppstein, whose tone and melodic lines enhance the feel of this

gem. Some clave from Shadoan adds a Latin twist. Shadoan then shifts from acoustic piano to Wurlitzer on his own contemporary funk-based original "Dubious Dachshund," which features another tone-setting solo from Eppstein and a muted trumpet segment from Tyler Murray that sets up Hunt's robust trombone solo. The big band digs right into Greg Hopkins' high-energy arrangement of Horace Silver's "Nutville." This one features Fisher on tenor and Hunt on trombone.

Indiana University jazz faculty member Wayne Wallace contributed "Fillmore Street Mambo," a delightful Latin piece that he wrote on a Jazz Education Network commission. The OSU Jazz Orchestra premiered it at the 2020 JEN Conference in New Orleans a month after this recording. It features Floeter on alto sax and the recording's only guest musicians: OSU faculty member Howard Potter on marimba and Aruba-born, Tulsa-based Michael Bremo on hand percussion.

Room 118 winds down with "I've Got What?," Steve Owen's challenging, intricate arrangement that takes the Gershwin brothers' "I Got Rhythm" into blistering territory. Its teasing, stop-and-start, and overlapping saxophone bits set up solos from Hunt, Fisher, and DeShazo. The band rose to the challenge—and delivered mightily.

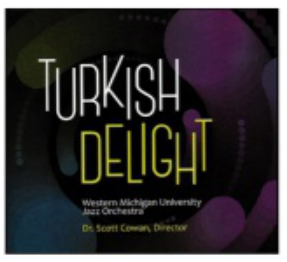
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Turkish Delight

BluJazz

Solid ensemble playing dominates this fine session as WMU's big band explores material ranging from the Count Basie and Duke Ellington repertoires to more exotic fare arranged by director Scott Cowan, Maria Schneider, and Edward Simon.

Turkish Delight opens with a Cowan arrangement of Dizzy Gillespie's "Bebop" that turns this small-band classic into a big-band romp. Exploding horn riffs lead into the extended exploration of Diz's distinctive melody, with the ensemble riding the fevered pace set by the rhythm section: pianist Rufus Ferguson, bassist Henry Rensch, and drummer Madison George.



There's a dramatic change in feel and texture on "I Can't Stop Loving You." Quincy Jones arranged this soulful chart for the Basie band in 1963, a year after Ray Charles recorded the definitive hit version. This one features call-and-response interludes, piano subtleties, and tight horn sections.

Edward Simon's arrangement of Horace Silver's classic "Song for My Father" takes its funky bossa feel into other Caribbean and Latin American rhythmic directions, seamlessly blending George's kit drumming and Jordan Otto's hand percussion. Brassy riffs accent extended solos from tenor saxophonist Mike Hudson and guitarist Max Brown. The band's bluesy take on the Count Basie/Jimmy Rushing classic "Goin' to Chicago" features vocals by Christian Diaz.

Latin and Middle Eastern grooves dominate the next two tracks. "Chucho" is Paquito D'Rivera's pulsing homage to pianist and former Irakere bandmate Chucho Valdés. This cha-cha features Elliot Bild on trumpet. Cowan's original "Turkish Delight," first recorded on the WMU Jazz Orchestra's 2005 recording *Boogaloo Land*, is rearranged here to feature first flutes and muted trumpets, then guitar and soprano saxes. Sam Pilnick's tenor sax solo soars over the top.

The orchestra revisits the Basie book for another Quincy Jones arrangement, the vocal staple "Alright, OK, You Win" that was a Joe Williams feature. Singer Allie Robson's clear, light vocals breeze over the horn riffs. Then the program shifts to the first of two pieces from the Ellington songbook. Duke's "Portrait of Wellman Braud" is a tribute to his 1920s and '30s bassist from 1970's New Orleans Suite. It features Rensch's nimble bass work, his melodic lines intersecting with piano before the band's muted horns color the background.

Maria Schneider's wistful arrangement of "My Ideal"—a 1930s ballad written for the movie *Playboy of Paris*—is something she wrote more than 25 years ago while studying at the Eastman School of Music. This version features Bild's exquisite solo trumpet artistry. Things wind down with the second Ellington piece, "Sepia Panorama" from 1940. The laid-back strutting mood set by Rensch's walking bass line fuels the muted interplay of this fine 21-member ensemble.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Celebrating 40 Years of Jazz at WVU

Mon Hills

WVU JAZZ ENSEMBLE 1

Sum of All the Parts

Spotify

These two Mountaineer recordings are poles apart in concept and configurations—one septet and one big band—yet they combine to make a very fine showcase for the WVU jazz studies program.

Celebrating 40 Years of Jazz at WVU is a septet recording from 2018 that features a half-dozen original compositions, one apiece from six of its instrumentalists. Saxophonist Tanner Davis' "Jocassee" is breezy and laid-back, though guitarist Collin Faulkenberry fires it up a notch with his nimble solo. Saxophonist Chad Williams contributed "Interrobang," which has a playful, cinematic feel that fuels his extended tenor solo.

"Even Now We Remember" is a samba from trombonist Khalid Gray. His robust horn solo over the ensemble leads into a teasing light response from pianist Michael Jones, who shifts with ease

between acoustic and electric piano and B-3 throughout the session.

Jones also composed the disc's clever gem, "Bird Song." Ensemble horn lines ride over a repeating 13-note melody that sets the tone for the solos that follow. The tenor sax fire here rides over a B-3 carpet before Jones takes the spotlight with a full-blown organ solo, then the melodic hook returns for the final bars. Drummer Wes Greer contributed "4 Minus 1," a stop-and-start teaser that features solos from trombonist Gray and Jones' B-3 over its hard-driving beat.

Guitarist Faulkenberry's "Under a Microscope" features a beautiful mood-setting opening and close from bassist Allison L'Ecuyer that segues to some electric piano and a unison horn exploration of its pensive melody. The composer's guitar artistry here is adventurous, setting up a fine tenor response.

Sum of All the Parts from WVU's 18-member Jazz Ensemble 1 was recorded remotely on the students' laptops in 2021 and stitched together in the studio; hence the project title. Jazz Studies director and JE1 leader Jared Sims wrote and arranged five of the seven pieces for this pandemic project, which has a decided Latin tinge. He and fellow faculty members John Bagnato (guitar) and Robert Sears (trumpet) are guest soloists on select tracks.

Boston-based trombonist Brian Thomas' high-energy tune "The Iguana" starts the musical ball rolling. It opens and closes with a playful flute feature, sandwiching an abundance of horn-section interplay. The trumpeters mix things up with high-energy solos from CJ Rhen and Alan Atkinsmith, setting up a vigorous interlude from Sims on baritone sax. Sims' "Samba Saudade" features beautiful ensemble playing, supplemented by the World Music department's Brazilian Ensemble, abundant with call-and-response passages. Bagnato's dark guitar solo accentuates the composition's feeling of longing, which continues through Owen Boachie's trombone solo.

"Blues Diffusion" features high-energy solos from Brenden Stilwell on tenor sax, Atkinsmith on trumpet, and composer Sims on alto sax. Late composer/arranger Sammy Nestico's gentle swinger "Prime Time" opens with a gorgeous solo from pianist Jones before horn-section interplay leads into fine spotlights for trombonist Boachie and Stilwell on tenor sax.

Percussion-rich "Conga Street Beat"

and "Samba Afoxe" are joyous romps that feature horn accents over the Latin rhythms, plus spirited solos from Boachie, Stilwell (alto on the first, tenor on the second), and trumpeters Atkinsmith ("Conga Street Beat") and Rhen ("Samba Afoxe"). The World Music department's African Ensemble joins the big band on "Conga Street Beat" and the Brazilian ensemble returns on "Samba Afoxe."

The gospel-tinged "Neo Soul Lullaby" closes the session. A digital delay on the horn section sets the mood and then cushions Sears' crisp, gently soaring trumpet solo. That horn treatment almost sounds like an accordion or melodica sneaked into the ensemble mix. It's a nice touch. ***JT***

2022-23 Jazz Education Guide ★★★

Abel Aranda

A Dream that Wouldn't Be Denied

Mexican guitarist ABEL ARANDA wanted to study jazz in the U.S.—and found help in a surprising place

By Ken Franckling

One year after Abel Aranda started studying guitar at the local church in his home city of Villahermosa, Mexico, his teacher played him Michael Brecker's 2001 *Nearness of You: The Ballad Book* album, featuring with Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, Charlie Haden, and Jack DeJohnette. The 16-year-old boy's interest in more popular music—punk, rock, metal, and prog rock—took a rapid turn.

"That was the day I fell in love with the sound of jazz," Aranda recalls. "I told myself that I would study hard so that one day I could study jazz in the United States."

It seemed like a teenager's pipe dream, given the many economic and social challenges facing an ordinary kid from a lower-class family in which nobody before him went to college. "The inequality of opportunities [in Mexico] is shameful and social mobility is very low compared to other countries," Aranda says.

But he realized he was learning more about the world through playing music, which he considered his purpose in life. After about 10 years of planning and saving, he was accepted into Veracruz University's jazz studies program. Tuition was the equivalent of $30 per year—and Aranda says even that sum was a financial challenge. He received a bachelor's degree in January 2020, two months before his 30th birthday.

He says he wanted to move from Villahermosa to Mexico City to pursue musical opportunities but had to return home to help support his family after his mother was diagnosed with cancer. Joining his family in the city of Puebla, he found work teaching guitar, improvisation, and arranging at a local university. He also taught at a high school and middle school, as well as giving private lessons. A few months later, it all became virtual teaching when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Pursuing a post-graduate degree in jazz studies was still top-of-mind, so Aranda auditioned for the graduate jazz studies program at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He was accepted but wasn't sure grad school was possible, even with a partial scholarship.

Aranda then visited about 10 government and private institutions in Mexico. He also wrote a letter to one of the richest men in the country, asking for support. Nobody responded. But he knew that Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, at least said that he favored giving opportunities to all Mexicans. So he drove two hours from Puebla to Mexico City on May 31, 2021, arriving at the National Palace before dawn to hand-deliver a letter seeking help.

While he was at the palace, Aranda spotted reporters arriving for a daily press briefing. He told Diego Cedillo of the *Tabasco Today* newspaper (one of his native region's local periodicals) about his situation, hoping the reporter would ask the president about it. Cedillo did so—not on that day but two weeks later, on June 16, which was Aranda's deadline to accept UArts' offer. In an extended answer, in which he talked about the purpose of education and his commitment to supporting those most in need, López Obrador said, "Yes, I will help the young man." Minutes later, Aranda received a phone call from the Office of the Federal Ministry of Culture, telling him that they would pay for everything he needed to study in Philadelphia.

"President López Obrador knew my case and without hesitation offered me the support to achieve my mission," Aranda says. "He truly believes that everyone who wants to study should have the opportunity to do so, that education is a right of all, no matter the economic and social condition of one's parents."

Aranda earned his UArts master's degree during his one year in Philadelphia, where director Don Glanden said he "excelled in all aspects of the graduate jazz studies program and was an inspiration to the other students with whom he interacted."

Before graduating last May, he auditioned for and was hired by Celebrity Cruises for its bands. He spent the summer and early fall aboard the 2,900-passenger Celebrity Apex, cruising through Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, the United Kingdom and Europe, returning in November for Miami-based Caribbean sailings. That experience will enable Aranda to acquire an American work visa and remain in the United States. He plans to settle in the Philly area and pursue a career as a guitarist, composer, and educator.

"Studying at UArts gave me a great perspective on jazz pedagogy and the professional attitudes that a musician must have to function at a high level in society," Aranda says. "It opened my eyes to see beyond a specific style and see that all great music is worth studying at an intellectually deep level." ***JT***

JOSÉ AGUILAR

KEF's LSX II speakers

The Best Stereo System for Jazz Fans

Jazz demands more—and less—from a stereo than R&B and rock do. Here's how to put together a top-rank system for swinging tunes

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

Ask an audiophile what kind of stereo setup a rock fan is likely to have, and they'll probably describe a JBL system with muscular amps and huge woofers. Ask them what a classical fan might have, and they'll likely cite elegant English speakers in a walnut finish driven by a classic McIntosh amp. But ask them what a jazz fan might have, and they may draw a blank.

I've had innumerable friends who love jazz, and their systems don't seem to share a note in common. But they should. Jazz—especially in its most revered form, the acoustic combo—places subtle demands on a system that might not concern fans of other genres. In some ways, though, acoustic jazz is less demanding on a stereo system than most genres.

Here are my tips for putting together a stereo system that'll work beautifully for everything from Louis Armstrong's Hot Five to the latest Julian Lage album.

YOU *CAN* GET STARTED

With just about every audio system, the most important consideration is the speakers. They have the biggest impact on the sound—and on your decor.

Jazz fans don't necessarily need to invest in big, expensive speakers. In most acoustic jazz, the lowest note commonly encountered is the low E on double bass, at 41 Hertz—and even with that low note, the harmonics at 82 Hz and up will probably be louder than the fundamental tone, depending on the recording. A good bookshelf speaker with a 6½-inch woofer is a safe bet, but even most speakers with just a 5¼-inch woofer will sound full enough for acoustic jazz. If you're into fusion—where you might hear a bigger kick drum, or an electric bass with a low B string—consider getting a small tower speaker for extra bass.

The first decision you have to make with a speaker is whether you want passive or active. A passive speaker has to be connected to an amplifier and to some sort of source, which could be a turntable, a CD player, a digital-to-analog converter (DAC) or a Bluetooth receiver. An active speaker has at least the amplifier built in, and many incorporate a Bluetooth receiver, a DAC, and a WiFi-based streaming technology such as Apple AirPlay 2 or Google Chromecast.

The advantage of passive speakers is

Clockwise from top left: U-Turn's Orbit Plus turntable, Triangle's Borea BR03 speakers, and Denon's PMA-600NE integrated amplifier

SORTING OUT STREAMING

For sound quality, WiFi streaming is preferable to Bluetooth, because Bluetooth's limited bandwidth requires that the sound be compressed, a process that sacrifices some fidelity. For Apple iOS devices, the most common system is Apple AirPlay (or AirPlay 2), and for Android devices, it's Google Chromecast. Amazon Alexa and Spotify Connect are other popular options that work with iOS and Android.

that you can use whatever electronics you want, and you can upgrade the electronics and add new sources as your budget increases or technology changes. The advantage of active speakers is simplicity: They usually require just one cable to connect the two speakers, plus an AC plug for power—and you may not need any other components, unless you want to add a turntable.

Fortunately, you can get great sound either way—but it's vital that you get a good speaker, one that can reveal the sonic details and ambience in the best jazz recordings. A well-designed, high-quality speaker will practically transport you into the recording venue, whether it's Columbia's old 30th Street studio (where *Kind of Blue* was recorded) or Carnegie Hall. You want a two-way or three-way speaker with a sturdy cabinet that doesn't ring or resonate much when you knock a knuckle on the side; online reviews can give you some clues about which models will serve you best.

You can spend whatever you want on speakers, but over about $3,000 per pair, you'll probably start to see diminishing returns on the extra investment. My favorite passive speaker to start with is the Triangle Borea BR03 bookshelf speaker, an impeccably engineered, nicely styled speaker with a 6½-inch woofer, a 1-inch tweeter and a price that often dips as low as $400 per pair. For an all-in-one active model with built-in Bluetooth and streaming, I'd start with the $799 SVS Prime Wireless Pro system, or the similarly capable but much sleeker $1,399 KEF LSX II system.

THE OTHER PLAYERS

If you're getting passive speakers, you'll need an amp—and again, there are countless good choices at a range of prices. The simplest option is an integrated amp, which combines a preamp (for volume control and source selection) and an amplifier. One great, modestly priced option is the $499 Denon PMA-600NE, which packs a 45-watt-per-channel amp, a DAC for connecting a computer or digital streaming device, a phono preamp for connecting a turntable, and Bluetooth into a single chassis. You might want to add a turntable too; decent models from U-Turn and Pro-Ject start at $199 and $349, respectively.

Whichever way you decide to start, and whatever you decide to spend, it's important that every jazz fan has a good stereo. Practically every jazz album since the late '50s is recorded to sound best on a set of high-quality stereo speakers, and you can't fully appreciate the art of the musicians or the recording engineers otherwise. ***JT***

John Patitucci

Bassists on Drummers

What the four-string set looks for in a rhythm-section partner

BY A.D. AMOROSI

As a *JazzTimes* writer, I can talk about the powers of a dynamic drummer until I'm blue in the face: the weight of each tom-tom's thwomp, the clanking of the rim, the stroking of the snare. What I can't express is the feeling of physical interplay, the empathetic energy, and the knotty-pine roots of psychology shared between those same drummers and the bassists who love them. Or hate them but crave to work with them. Or just got thrown into a van with them and have been told to battle it out.

Tighter than most marriages—and often more sensual, spiritual, and frenetic too—a great rhythm section rattles and hums with the vibes of the universe at its back and a groove in its step. *JazzTimes* spoke to three bassists from diverse musical backgrounds about what they look for in a drummer, and which ones they've dug hanging with the most.

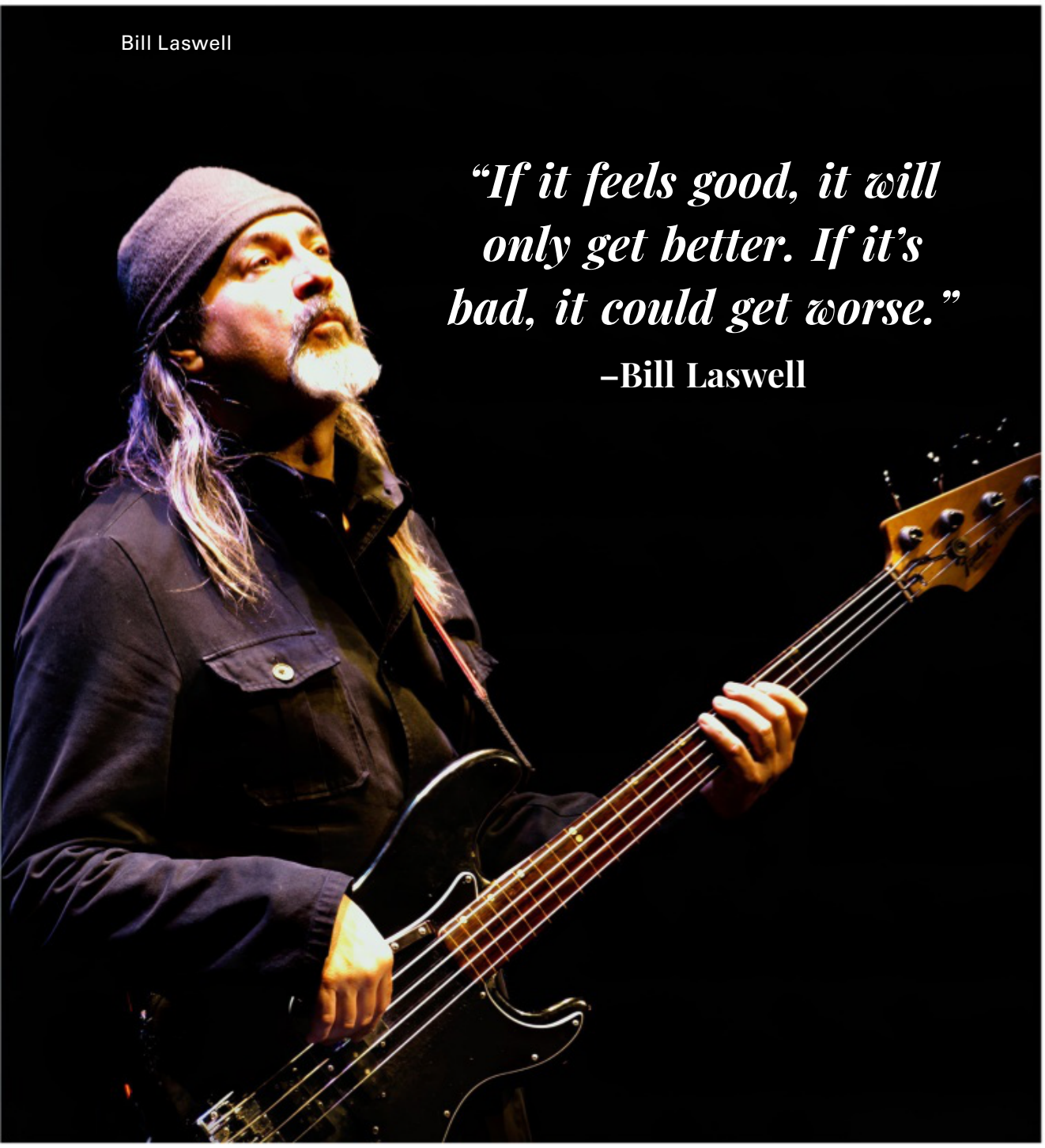
HENRY FRANKLIN

When Jazz Is Dead releases *JID 14* this autumn, the label adds an extra-special notch to its figurative belt: a creative partnership with California double-bass legend Henry Franklin. Beyond being famed as "The Skipper," his nickname as one-time house bassist for the cherished Black Jazz label, Franklin has played with rhythm men such as Willie Bobo and Billy Higgins, and had his track "Soft Spirit" sampled by A Tribe Called Quest.

Easy to laugh and quick to recall all, Franklin wasted no time pointing out his specifications in a great drummer: "In a dynamic partner in rhythm, I always look for the time, for the space, and I look for someone who can play the cymbals uniquely, the rides. I love finding out about the compatibility that we'll have with each other."

Franklin, who's been working professionally since he was a part of Hugh Masekela's band—he was the trumpeter's bass man at 1967's Monterey Pop Festival and you can hear him on the 1968 hit "Grazing in the Grass"—can name a number of drummers with whom he was especially simpatico. "My favorite of all time was Sonship," he said of Charles Lloyd's onetime drummer (born Woody Theus). "He was dynamic, had energy without having a lot of volume control, had the necessary looseness, and knew how to lay back when a bassist played a solo. Ndugu Chancler was a great timekeeper. Michael Carvin and I played together a lot in the 1960s, and we locked together well. I recently played with Mike Clark, and I loved our camaraderie. And I learned so much playing with Billy Hart, mainly keeping up with his fours and his eights—how he plays his times is just impeccable."

SANTIAGO INTERIANO



JOHN PATITUCCI

Renowned for fusion and acoustic jazz sessions with drummers such as Peter Erskine, Vinnie Colaiuta, Jack DeJohnette, Omar Hakim, and Steve Gadd since the late 1970s, bassist/composer/Three Faces label co-owner John Patitucci never slows. As we speak, he's putting the finishing touches on his *Live in Italy* release with Chris Potter and one of his DOCs (Drummers of Choice), Brian Blade. Whether Patitucci's talking about friends or stickmen, Blade is at the top of Patitucci's list—the 20-plus years they've worked together mean something special to him.

"If you're asking about drummers, Brian is part of my family," he says. "I love Brian with all of my heart, and he's one of the most incredible musicians in the history of jazz … of every style of music."

Beyond brotherly affection, what Patitucci says he's looking for in a drummer is often more ephemeral than it is physical, and usually "mystical" in its decision-making. "There's the nuts-and-bolts part: the time feel, the flexibility, the way they orchestrate, the big ears to be able to listen and react, the ability to be an incredible musician who plays the drums instead of one who's just looking to show off licks," he says. "But there's something too that you can't always put a finger on. The classic guys that we love—Elvin [Jones], Tony [Williams], Paul [Motian], Jack [DeJohnette]—even guys I came up with like [Dave] Weckl and Colaiuta, they have developed musical minds beyond technique. Steve Jordan, Jeff Porcaro, Nate Smith, and Bernard Purdie too."

Not only does Patitucci revere drummers, but he also wanted to be one before he picked up the bass; he still keeps a set around his home studio. "My dad wouldn't let me have a set when I was a kid, but I wanted to be that guy," he says. "As soon as I was an adult and had my own place, I got a set of drums. And I always tell my students, you don't have a great band until you have a great drummer … it's such a powerful center."

BILL LASWELL

Genre-jumping bassist/composer/producer Bill Laswell had just dropped his Ropeadope collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Ulf Ivarsson, *Nammu*, when we spoke, so the innate quality of rhythm as the bloodline of all that he's done—with both drummers and drum machines—was still fresh in his ears.

"I don't look for specific things in drummers or percussionists, but what is important—what I'd expect to happen and engage with—is feel and tone, as to how they resonate in terms of dynamic," Laswell says. "Time, or keeping time, not as much. Creating something that feels good, something you can build on, is paramount to me. If it feels good, it will only get better. If it's bad, it could get worse."

The bassist always hopes to come out of each experience with a drummer having "a little more perspective, a little more expectation" as to what's possible sonically. "And I've had nothing but good experiences."

When he considers the best relationships and interplay between himself and key drummers in his life, Laswell goes back to early in his career: "The first examples that come to mind are Tony Williams [whose second album with Laswell under the band name of Arcana, 1997's *Arc of the Testimony*, was re-released on Bandcamp last year] or someone as distinctive as Ginger Baker—you're not going to find other drummers who played as they did. Ziggy Modeliste and Sly Dunbar could keep a beat that could hypnotize. [Playing] with challenging drummers such as Ronald Shannon Jackson and Milford Graves—if you did it right—held great results."

What drumming could possibly be "challenging" to a veteran like Laswell? "If you work with certain drummers," he explains, "you develop a language that can only be done by the two people—some take time, some of it is immediate. Like Ian Chang, with whom I've worked playing with Dave Douglas. He was a natural, and new, and our feel came fast. Aaron Johnston, Mark Guiliana too. They're establishing unusual things and new languages. That's challenging to me." ***JT***

Great in Concept

Great in Concept Roland continues its 50th-anniversary festivities with a tech tour

BY MAC RANDALL

Clockwise from top left: The Roland D-Flux, JUPITER-X 50th Anniversary, and 50th Anniversary Concept Model Piano

Remember back in the spring, when we reported on the **Roland** Corporation's 50th anniversary and hinted that there would be multiple products launched this year in celebration? Well, that has indeed come to pass, with the debut of history-acknowledging effects units like the BOSS RE-2 and RE-202 Space Echo (repackaging a 1970s classic in foot-pedal form) and synthesizers like the JUNO-X (an update of an '80s favorite). Now the folks at Roland have taken anniversary mania to what may be its peak level, announcing three very exclusive new releases: an electronic drum kit, an electronic piano, and a new-school take on an analog synth. At the same time, they've published three articles on the anniversary section of their website highlighting the history of—yes, you guessed it—Roland electronic drums, pianos, and synthesizers.

These three new releases are referred to as "concept models," which may make more sense to you shortly. But first, some details. The drum kit is called the **D-Flux**, and longtime Roland watchers will note that its mesh pads have inherited the geometric shape of the company's 1985 α (Alpha) Drum, which was one of the first electronic kits to adopt digital PCM waveform synthesis in the quest to achieve a more realistic sound. Multiple D-Flux tones can be assigned to a single pad—up to three in the center and another three around the rim, enabling a user to play chords if desired. For the kick drum, Roland developed a unique belt kick feature with two beaters and two belts; either one can be used independently for greater dynamic range.

As for the piano, it's an eye-catcher for sure: a collaboration with the Japanese furniture maker Karimoku called simply the **50th Anniversary Concept Model Piano**. Its one-piece molded body, incorporating multiple layers of Nara oak, evokes a futuristic space egg, especially when the top lid's closed, and of course there's a matching stool. The Roland PureAcoustic Modeling engine is employed for sonic realism, and a patent-pending sense algorithm responds in the way you'd expect to different degrees of touch on both keys and pedals.

Finally, there's the **JUPITER-X 50th Anniversary** synthesizer. Its design may be highly retro—reminiscent of that fabled analog wonder, 1981's JUPITER-8—but its inner workings are far more technologically advanced than an '80s synth: all-digital and making use of the ZEN-Core Synthesis System that Roland introduced three years ago. The black keyboard with gold accents will undoubtedly attract plenty of attention too.

By now, you may be wondering where you can check out all this cool new stuff—and the answer to that question is a bit tricky. Remember when I said that these "concept" models were very exclusive? I meant *very* exclusive … as in not for sale. At all. Instead, they're touring the world, like some kind of high-tech celebrities. I guess some concepts are meant to rise above mere commercial considerations? In any case, the best I can tell you to do is check the anniversary section of Roland's website (articles.roland.com) and see where they're headed next. ***JT***

5 FOR THE ROAD

Spirit of '66

Part of **Fender**'s new American Vintage II series, the **American Vintage II 1966 Jazz Bass** captures the look and feel of an iconic instrument (which at one time was actually looked down on by collectors obsessed with pre-CBS Fenders). It's all here, from the U-shape hard rock maple neck with 7.25"-radius rosewood fingerboard and vintage tall frets to the threaded four-saddle bridge, lollipop tuners, and Pure Vintage '66 Jazz Bass pickups. And no, your eyes aren't tricking you; the above model's a lefty.

$2,299.99 MSRP | fender.com

Some Changes Made

Running the Changes **(Hal Leonard),** by the University of North Texas' Mike Steinel, guides musicians of all levels through the essentials of improvising over chord changes, covering all major parts of an instrumental ensemble along with lead sheets for vocalists. Topics addressed in the 144-page book include melodic paraphrase and quotation; basic chord theory; scalar/modal soloing; bebop scales; and more. Play-along tracks are available online.

$29.99 MSRP | halleonard.com

New Life on Mars

Mapex has reimagined its Mars line of drum kits with what it calls a "pocket-friendly sonic classic": the **Mars Maple**. Its 100% 7-ply European maple shells are fitted with bearing edges that allow drumheads to make better contact. Additional features include insulated bass drum claws, matching wood snare drums, and bass drum-mounted tom holders equipped with a proprietary suspension system. Available in 4-, 5- (shown here), and 6-piece configurations in Glossy Amber (shown here), Natural Satin, Matte Black, and Midnight Blue finishes.

$699 online | mapexdrums.com

Automatic Kicks

If you play solo or in a percussion-less group and habitually stomp on the floor to keep time, you may want to consider investing in the **Ployted BOOM KICK**, a stompbox that activates a bass drum synthesizer. Tempos can be adjusted by tapping the footswitch, syncing to other instruments via MIDI, turning a knob, or using the automatic Boom Kick control. Three preset sounds can be edited with seven parameters of seven values each. Your foot will thank you.

€399 MSRP | ployted.com

The Condensed Version

Designed for the home and/or mobile recording enthusiast, the **Audio-Technica AT2020USB-X** cardioid condenser microphone offers the acclaimed sound of the company's previous AT2020USB+, upgraded to a 24-bit/96 kHz sampling rate with the convenience of plug-and-play USB-C operation (the accompanying cable has USB-C and USB-A options). A built-in headphone jack with volume and mix control lets you directly monitor with no delay, as well as blend your microphone signal with computer audio.

$149 MSRP | audio-technica.com

"Feeling out the finicky mistress of jazz": Charles Lloyd

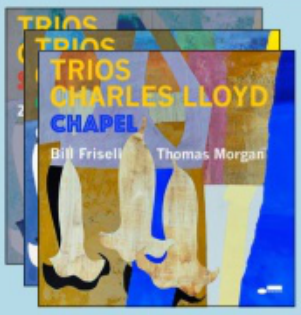
Three for Three

Charles Lloyd goes for a career-capping trifecta

CHARLES LLOYD

Trios: Chapel
Trios: Ocean
Trios: Sacred Thread

Blue Note



Saxophonist/flutist Charles Lloyd seems to be finding solace in his jazz roots as he gets older. Feeling out the finicky mistress of jazz, the thing that tantalized him at his start, is as much a personal reconnoitering as a furthering of his aesthetic.For his newest (and neatest) trick, Lloyd has created three trios for three albums released on three separate dates: *Chapel* with guitarist Bill Frisell and bassist Thomas Morgan, *Ocean* with pianist Gerald Clayton and guitarist Anthony Wilson, and *Sacred Thread* with guitarist Julian Lage and singer/percussionist Zakir Hussain.

Ocean is closest in mood to Lloyd's earliest days, with its gentle counterpoints, quietly dramatic flute runs, and mournful tenor phrases on tracks such as "The Lonely One." Plus, Clayton is the son of John Clayton, the L.A. bandleader with whom Lloyd jammed in the 1950s. Combine that with Wilson's Californian tingle, the restless saxophonist's blasts of Ornette-like reverie ("Hagar of the Inuits"), and a love of the Latin vibe that highlights more than a few warm moments within, and you have a reminiscence of cool West Coast jazz, ruefully deconstructed.

For *Chapel* (recorded at San Antonio's Coates Chapel), joining forces with Frisell and Morgan meant deconstruction of a higher order: crepuscular Cubist reconfiguration of old faves like Billy Strayhorn's "Blood Count" (a slow stewing, devout to the point of being dear) and the Cuban fantasia of "Ay Amor" (exotic yet far more abstract than the Latin cabaret classic). Flipping through his own back pages for "Song My Lady Sings" from 1966, Lloyd doubles down on new double-time codas; his flute-filled "Beyond Darkness" allows its threesome a most theatrical interplay.

Sacred Thread finds Hussain (the only vocalist on these albums) wailing in spiritual dialogue with the leader's arsenal of saxophones and flute. The sparkly spanner in the works is Lage, moving within their conversation like a third warm wind. You could joke that this makes for nothing but hot air, but you'd be missing out on the nuances of holy, silence-rich songs ("Guman," "Saraswati") and Lloyd's own low-key tonic ritual, "The Blessing." **—A.D. AMOROSI**

REDMAN/ MEHLDAU/ McBRIDE/ BLADE

LongGone

Nonesuch

You go into *LongGone* with the knowledge that saxophonist Joshua Redman, pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist Christian McBride, and drummer Brian Blade are long-established masters, and a foregone conclusion that what you're about to hear will surely be stellar. And it is.

As the Joshua Redman Quartet, the young upstarts first recorded together in 1994 on the heralded *MoodSwing*. Then they took a lengthy break, returning in 2020 with *Round-Again*. That album, which featured material composed individually by all four, sounded like the work of an outfit that had been meeting up regularly all along; there was a comforting familiarity embedded in

their interactions, a cohesiveness that belied the time they'd spent apart building their own careers.

LongGone feels no less unified, although it takes a slightly different tack: All six pieces are written by Redman, who takes more of a leadership role. That isn't to say that Mehldau, McBride, and Blade fall into accompanist roles, only that Redman pops out more often and more determinedly throughout. He's pointing the way from the opening seconds of the title track, and he's still doing so when the sole live number, a killer updating of "Rejoice" from *MoodSwing*, reaches its peak velocity.

Redman's dominance aside, *LongGone* ultimately isn't about the dexterity of the individual. Like its predecessors, it's a textbook display of what happens when a group of musicians—each a leader in his own right—understand and trust one another enough to let the music go where it must.

—JEFF TAMARKIN

BILL FRISELL

Four

Blue Note

All hail Bill Frisell—the Man, the Myth, the Marksman—but this set had me from "Johnathan Blake." Gigging in Ravi Coltrane's band a few years back, the drummer manifested a human fusion reactor, to the point of laying out beat multiplicities with a sweat-drenched towel laid right over his snare. Here he hits cooler, though never cooled off; organically attuned to the other three; putting in, leaving out; laying down his pieces of the jigsaw, but careful to never finish the puzzle, because his incompleteness must overlay incompletenesses from Frisell's guitar, Gerald Clayton's piano, Gregory Tardy's sax and clarinet.

And Frisell shows the outstanding wisdom to just plain lay out in spots. *After all*, you feel him reasoning, t*his cooks, this swings*, and the fewer-pieces process doesn't necessarily need the man with

the name on the front cover. Parts suggest a warm but lonely Southern night, that Tardy clarinet earnest for a friend while the others murmur concerned in the background: Not much chance, man, not much chance. Tardy switches up horns, sometimes mid-tune, swapping melancholy licorice stick for take-charge tenor.

This is ultimately an area where anyone can use the Frisell tunes to talk, to testify—so long as you understand and respect the room vibe—where anyone (or anyones) can talk back, not talk back, riff on your riffing, or simply sit back. To admire, quietly, how you moved your piece, just that far enough, to let the space shine.

—ANDREW HAMLIN

SAMARA JOY

Linger Awhile

Verve

Every so often a new vocalist blows everyone on the jazz scene away with their distinctive style, charm, and dexterity. Samara Joy is that new voice that's giving new purpose to the music. Last year, the 22-year-old put out her self-titled album debut; since graduating from college, she has also performed in Switzerland and Paris. (Her live performances are just as breathtaking as experiencing her on wax. For many musicians that's not so easy, but she does it effortlessly.)

Touring internationally has sharpened her skills. There's plenty of evidence of that musical maturation on her new recording *Linger Awhile*, a nostalgic stroll through well-known and obscure standards. One trait she carries on from her last album is the mixing of swing and sweet tunes. The romantic feel she infuses into songs would make any loving couple want to hold each other while listening to her sing.

Joy gracefully takes listeners through the sassy "Sweet Pumpkin," featuring guitarist Pasquale Grasso, whose handy work on the strings is also prominently featured on the album. On "Guess Who I Saw Today," she draws listeners in with her knack for convincingly telling a love story through song.

She also takes on the

JOSEPH ALLEN

longstanding vocalese tradition on "Nostalgia (The Day I Knew)" and "I'm Confessin'," which combines her lyrics with Lester Young's 1952 solo. (It's worth

noting here that her songwriting acumen is equally arresting as her singing.)

Joy's primary aim in making this beauty was to further perfect her poetic vocals on songs that have deepened with time. There is much to be admired on *Linger Awhile*.

—VERONICA JOHNSON

WILLIAM PARKER

Universal Tonality

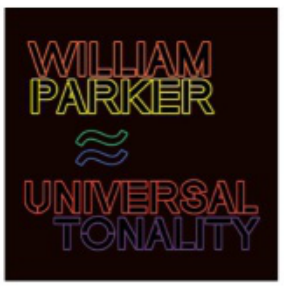
Centering/AUM Fidelity

At the midpoint of *Universal Tonality*'s opening composition, "Tails of a Peacock," spoken-word artist and vocalist Leena Conquest interjects, "Where there's a will/ there's a way/to survive/ Hope is relentless, hope is relentless/It will never die." Conquest speaks/sings Parker's lyrics throughout the two-hour piece, as a 16-piece orchestra swells and deflates, swings and turns rubato, fires madly abstract and sweetly, four to the bar.

Universal Tonality was recorded at the onetime location of Roulette in Tribeca on December 14, 2002, and one could surmise that the music's passionately billowing waves of abstract expressionism were in some way fueled by the horrors of September 11, 2001. Tribeca is directly north of what was Ground Zero, and while any direct inspiration is impossible to confirm, surely the assembled musicians felt the music deeply, the atmosphere of the location itself impossible to escape.

The performance included such historical figures as Grachan Moncur III, Billy Bang, Jerome Cooper, and Dave Burrell, joined by Gerald Cleaver, Joe Morris, Matt Lavelle, Steve Swell, and Conquest, who acts as the music's divination point. All these musicians were integral to Parker's music through the years, the performance a kind of open-ended overview of his amazing body of work.

Though a score was composed, the musicians' participation was optional, helping to make this truly egalitarian sound work—what Parker called "breathing together"—vital and democratic. Separate voices flow to the surface at will, then just



as easily glide back into the weblike structure of the piece.

"There are no keys, no chord changes, modes or notations," Parker wrote in the album's liner notes. "We all speak different languages, but we feel each other. The music guides us. All we have to do is listen. All we have to do is feel."

—KEN MICALLEF

THE COMET IS COMING

Hyper-Dimensional Expansion Beam

Impulse!

Hyper-Dimensional Expansion Beam contains some of the most aggressive music that London electro-jazz trio The Comet Is Coming has ever purveyed. Betamax's drum attack all but explodes with adrenaline, with his and synth man Danalogue's layered rhythms equally ferocious. Meanwhile, Shabaka Hutchings' tenor sax and flute have more abrasive tones and greater urgency than ever.

Intensity throttled up to 14, however, is about the only thing you'll find on Comet's third full-length that you won't find—often done better—on their other two albums and three EPs. Perhaps Danalogue has increased his array of synthesizer voices, many of them—as on "Technicolour" or

"Aftermath"—warbly '80s throwbacks. (One suspects he's been watching Netflix's retro-horror series *Stranger Things*.) They make tracks like "Tokyo Nights" fun for this aging Gen Xer, evoking nostalgia for Vangelis and Tangerine Dream soundtracks, but putting those colors against animated dance beats and sax yelps is still just par for this course.

So is the sustained chill in the grooves of "Lucid Dreamer" and the closing "The Hammer." They're nice, but they're crowded with sounds in a way that harshes the mellow. (For a much cleaner version of this vibe, turn back to "Birth of Creation" on their 2019 album *Trust in the Lifeforce of the Deep Mystery*). Meanwhile, Hutchings' saxophone lines are either heralding ennui from the gifted Brit or they're dubbed/ edited to the point of exhaustion. Either way, tracks like "Frequency of Feeling Expansion," which on its face feels exploratory, are forced into loops and on-the-nose syncopations that wear out fast.

There is something to the album's aggression, which renders "Code," "Pyramids," and "Angel of Darkness" more mosh pit than dancefloor. Truthfully, though, Comet's 2015 debut EP *Prophecy* did in-your-face better too.

—MICHAEL J. WEST

SARAH ELIZABETH CHARLES

Blank Canvas

Stretch/Ropeadope

Musically, Sarah Elizabeth Charles has been stretching her wings since the release of her last album with her band Scope, 2017's *Free of Form*. The Brooklyn vocalist and composer toured and recorded with French-Tunisian saxophonist Yacine Boulares' wswx2orld-jazz combo Ajoyo and collaborated with trumpeter Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah. *Tone*, her 2020 duo album with pianist/ husband Jarrett Cherner, seemed to process raw emotions in real time. Her new Scope project *Blank Canvas* captures Charles in a very different place: reflective, self-possessed, and reaching out with a voice that's as beautiful as it is arresting.

With guitarist Jordan Peters joining her long-

time bandmates—pianist/keyboardist and co-producer Jesse Elder, bassist Burniss Earl Travis II, and drummer John Davis—Charles opens the album reciting "Guest House," a Rumi poem (via Coleman Barks) that speaks of mortal arrivals and departures. Sonically the album is all over the map, but Charles is a steady guide. The first two songs, "Borders" and "Blank Canvas," are fierce, arena-sized ballads with rock production. After the stormy catharsis Charles gazes inward, leading to the gauzy ballad "Malba."

The album's emotional centerpiece is a taut, spacious deconstruction of Max Roach/Oscar Brown Jr.'s famously unfinished *We Insist!* anthem "Freedom Day," which adds Adjuah into the mix on his self-designed Adjuah Bow. Plucking the stringed instrument, he also contributes to Charles' brief, aching evocation of her lost sibling "Brother," which she co-wrote with Adjuah. Thematically and texturally, the concluding four tracks almost feel like a self-contained suite, shimmering with sharp observations and self-revelations, starting with her sympathetic portrait of a relationship in extremis, "Out Loud." The atmospheric "Blind Emotions" evokes turmoil with lapidary vocal tracks, while "BE the Solution" offers a path toward inner peace. Closing with "The Message," a lithe incantation, Charles sounds renewed, revived, and ready for her next adventure.

—ANDREW GILBERT

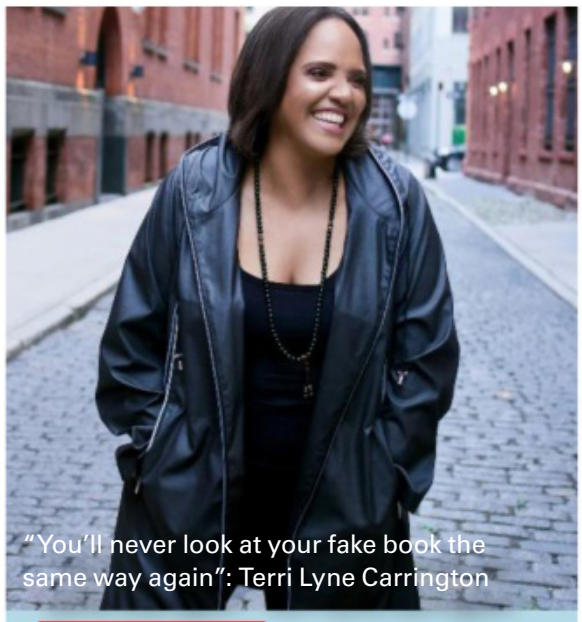
OUT TO DINNER

Food Is Medicine

Posi-Tone

Out to Dinner is less a band than a repertory company and a concept. Over four releases to date, the personnel has varied somewhat, but the concept has continued: a tribute to Eric Dolphy's classic 1964 album *Out to Lunch*. What Out to Dinner takes from *Out to Lunch* is the instrumentation and a mindset that might be described as "semi-avant-garde." The players on *Food Is Medicine* are Patrick Cornelius (alto saxophone), Behn Gillece (vibraphone), Boris Kozlov (bass), Rudy Royston (drums), and Ryan Keberle (whose trombone replaces Freddie Hubbard's trumpet in Dolphy's quintet).

On the Dolphy album, with no piano present, chord progressions are implicit. Out to Dinner shares this proclivity for spontaneous collective harmony, as well as a



"You'll never look at your fake book the same way again": Terri Lyne Carrington

EDITOR'S PICK

TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

new STANDARDS vol. 1

Candid

Drummer extraordinaire Terri Lyne Carrington's new multimedia project, *New Standards*, is getting as much press coverage as one could hope for regarding a jazz offering in 2022. Everyone from NPR to *The New York Times* has praised Carrington's efforts to broaden male-dominated sheet-music repertoire by including women composers. But with that came a risk: that the mere *existence* of a book called *New Standards: 101 Lead Sheets by Women Composers* would attract more interest than its contents.

Which brings us to new *STANDARDS vol. 1*, the first in a promised series covering all 101 composers. Do the compositions and performances therein live up to the hype? Absolutely.

Carrington is flanked by a core group of pianist Kris Davis, bassist Linda May Han Oh, trumpeter Nicholas Payton, and guitarist Matthew Stevens, with high-profile guests from Ambrose Akinmusire to Samara Joy popping up throughout. The composers represented include Carla Bley, Abbey Lincoln, Brandee Younger, and Marta Sanchez. But aside from name recognition, the most crucial element here is that the compositions are *fantastic*. Sara Cassey's lovely opener "Wind Flower" dips, sparkles, and sways. Patricia Zárate-Pérez's "Continental Cliff" is pensive and philosophical. Bley's "Two Hearts (Lawns)" is an emotional apogee, with rising star Joy nodding to the lineage of women geniuses with a rich and evocative vocal performance.

If this were the only edition, it would more than hold up on its own due to the caliber of talent and source material. A quick calculation—101 divided by 11 tracks—would imply that we'll conclude with nine recorded volumes of tunes by staggeringly talented women. But based just on the strength of this first one, you'll never look at your fake book the same way again. .

— MORGAN ENOS

commitment to kinetic group interplay.

The near reaches of the avant-garde can be a very fertile zone, offering both the excitement of surprise and the reassurance of some structure. Out to Dinner is a tight (except when they're loose), hot, concise, take-no-prisoners band. Their infectious positive energy starts with the bombardments of the relentless Royston. The player who most determines the overall sound is Gillece. His lingering silvery fills illuminate the ensemble from within.

In this hard-hitting band, the heaviest puncher is Keberle. Like a champion boxer, he has all the moves: jabs, hooks, uppercuts, crosses. Cornelius writes cool tunes. His "Waiting for Takeoff" is meticulously assembled from layered refrains yet feels airy. His intriguing "We Dare" is the closest this extroverted group gets to pensiveness.

Out to Dinner is a project with its own proud personality. The Dolphy connection is only an inspirational reference point, not a model. Still, it might be fun to hear them cover one tune from *Out to Lunch*. In their first four albums, they have not yet taken on that challenge.

—THOMAS CONRAD

MALI OBOMSAWIN

Sweet Tooth

Out Of Your Head

Mali Obomsawin's debut album as a leader is billed as "a suite for Indigenous resistance" that "flies in the face of Western tropes that insist Indigenous cultures are monolithic, trapped in time." But with that statement of purpose established, it's worth noting that *Sweet Tooth* is a breath of fresh air in a different way: It's a bassist-as-bandleader album that doesn't overdose on four strings.

Obomsawin wisely swerves around every cliché regarding a bass player in her position. Her reverence for her accompanists—cornetist and flugelhornist Taylor Ho Bynum, saxophonist Noah Campbell, clarinetist and alto saxophonist Allison Burik, guitarist Mirian Elhajli, and drummer Savannah Harris—means she never renders S*weet Tooth* a self-serving affair, despite her name being on the sleeve. Rather, Obomsawin remains the central pillar in the architecture, allowing the rest of the sextet to shine on their own terms.

Elhajli is a wonder throughout—whether providing sparkling comping on acoustic guitar, like on "Fractions," or picking up an electric and going full John McLaughlin on "Lineage" and "Blood

Quantum." Harris is spectacular throughout, too—in equal parts sympathetic and commanding. As for the horn players, they aren't afraid to go fiery and "out." But in a way that comports with the album's well-rounded ethos, their workouts never feel indulgent, always earned.

Sweet Tooth may be Obomsawin's debut, but it never feels tentative: The compositions and performances meet at a similar high watermark. And, thankfully, it not only works as potent commentary on Indigenous heritage, autonomy and experiences, but as gripping, dynamic, and thunderous music in and of itself. All that without an ounce of overshowing.

—MORGAN ENOS

SARAH BERNSTEIN

Veer Quartet

New Focus

Violinist Sarah Bernstein has worked in musical situations ranging from synth-pop and electronica to more straightforward jazz and free improvisation, sometimes incorporating spoken word along with instrumental work. *Veer Quartet* places her in more of a chamber music setting, which she gives a pronounced twist.

The quartet of Bernstein, Sana Nagano (violin), Leonor Falcon (viola), and Nick Jozwiak (cello) alternate between through-composed music and pieces that leave room for improvisation. Sometimes both approaches come within one track, like "News Cycle Progression," which begins with a weighty, alluring melody that shifts into a section built of spry, plucked lines from all four strings. At other times, the distinction is more obvious. "Frames No. 1" continually refers back to a short musical figure between solos by all four players that evoke different moods. "Clay Myth" also gives everyone solo space, with the backdrops shifting from a bright pizzicato to a somewhat folky groove.

Throughout the album, Bernstein writes diverse parts that make each player stand out individually even as they work together to develop the piece. However, the album would benefit from a bit more forward motion, as the out-of-tempo stops become commonplace and make some of the tracks a bit too similar. By contrast, the climax of "World Warrior" gets unhinged toward the end, with the group adding scrapes and pops for emphasis. And "Hidden" features a violin solo beneath a repeating structure that gets heavier and darker as it proceeds, which gives the album a strong closing statement. If moments like these occurred more often, *Veer Quartet* would have more foundation to complement their strong group sound.

—MIKE SHANLEY

MAKAYA McCRAVEN

In These Times

International Anthem/ Nonesuch

Drummer and composer Makaya McCraven calls himself a "beat scientist," and he lives up to the title (as do other drummers like Kassa Overall and Karriem Riggins). The Paris-born, Chicago-based McCraven often makes records by recording live sessions, then editing them into mesmerizing collages of sound full of approachable sonic narratives, beguiling textures, and enrapturing rhythms. In many ways he is (in classic jazz terms) Teo Macero and Miles Davis combined, and like the legendary trumpeter he attracts the very best musicians of our time to collaborate. This time

out, vibraphone master Joel Ross is on hand, as are harpist Brandee Younger, bassist Junius Paul, saxophonist Greg Ward, and guitarist Jeff Parker. If McCraven just wanted to hold a public blowing session with these cats, it would be well worth hearing.

MICHAEL GOLDMAN

In These Times begins with the title track, highlighted by a tape of Harry Belafonte talking about John Henry and progress on a Studs Terkel radio show backed gently with sounds evocative of twilight. Paul's bass anchors the next piece, "The Fours," then Parker's guitar does the same for "High Fives." Both are augmented with a dense weave of sumptuous sound layers. This has been McCraven's m.o. throughout his recordings as a leader like *Universal Beings* (2018) and *In the Moment* (2015), as well as on some of his remix/producer projects, but what's emerging from this release is how it reflects another new Chicago sound. The album feels of a piece with recent work from Rob Mazurek's Exploding Star Orchestra and Parker's solo projects. It even hearkens back to *TNT*-era Tortoise. It's music that lures you into its unique veneer and blurs genre borders into oblivion.

—MARTIN JOHNSON

JACKIE RYAN

Recuerdos de Mi Madre

Open Art Productions

Some singers play it cool. Whatever language she sings in, Jackie Ryan wears her heart on her sleeve. The multilingual San Francisco Bay Area vocalist has released a small but emotionally expansive discography that seamlessly weaves Brazilian, French, and Latin American and American Songbook standards into a Technicolor jazz tapestry. Her new bolero-centric album *Recuerdos de Mi Madre* might seem like a departure, but it's actually a return home.

Dedicated to her Acapulco-raised mother, *Recuerdos* collects classic Latin American songs that served as a cultural lifeline to Mexico when Ryan was growing up in Marin County. Rather than transforming these standards into Latin jazz vehicles, Ryan focuses on wringing a lifetime of feeling out of classic songs. She's joined by a stellar cast of Bay Area jazz musicians, including pianist/arranger Marco Diaz.

Special guest Paquito D'Rivera contributes on three tracks that frame the project, starting with Diaz's dramatic arrangement of Carlos Gardel and Alfredo Le Pera's "El Día Que Me Quieras." Ryan luxuriates in the bolero setting while D'Rivera's liquid clarinet seems to conjure the golden-hued past even as it fades. On Mexican composer Alberto Domínguez's "Perfidia," Diaz propels Ryan's bitter, resigned indictment with a tango beat; D'Rivera, again on clarinet, serves as a foil. A searing salsa in-

terpretation of "Quizás, Quizás, Quizás" by Cuban songwriter Osvaldo Farrés closes the album, fueled by D'Rivera's alto sax.

If Ryan doesn't wander far off the beaten path on *Recuerdos*, she keeps changing up the textures, as with Paraguayan violinist Carlos Reyes' searing accompaniment on Mexican songwriter Agustín Lara's waltz "Noche de Ronda." Besotted, heartbroken, and anything but bewildered, Ryan's tribute to her mother and a golden age of Latin American music adds a new jewel to her glittering trove.

—ANDREW GILBERT

THE BAYLOR PROJECT

The Evening: Live at APPARATUS

Be a Light/Motown Gospel

For years I've thought that the vibrant, soulful sounds of the Baylor Project, the husband-and-wife duo of vocalist Jean and drummer Marcus Baylor, belonged in a jazz party; it turns out that designer Gabriel Hendifar agrees. He's the co-founder and artistic director of APPARATUS, the 10-year-old interdisciplinary design studio in New York that explores the relationship of lighting, furniture, objects, and spaces. Hendifar's latest collection, Act Four, takes its cues from the 1960s and jazz, so he created a jazz club at his space called MUMS

(after the thousands of chrysanthemums that adorned it) and invited the Baylors to record their new album there. They brought their band featuring pianist Terry Brewer, saxophonist Keith Loftis, trumpeter Darren Barrett, trombonist Mark Williams, and bassist Yasushi Nakamura; invited a few dozen friends; and let the good times roll.

The Baylors' music is contemporary but evokes the spirit of the boundary-less jazz from 60 years ago. When they play, it's easy to imagine an era where Dave Lambert or Paul Gonsalves might drop by and sit in. Listening to the new recording, I wondered if vinyl copies of Aretha's Columbia discs were part of the decor.

They set the mood with a loose-limbed, saucy take on the Gershwin classic "Our Love Is Here to Stay." Then they dive into the gospel repertoire for "Lord Keep Me Day by Day." From there, it sprawls, moving between standards and gospels held together by Jean's lithe voice, Marcus' drums, Brewer's keys, and Loftis' solid solos. Appropriately, they dedicate a tune to Hendifar, and it's an original called "We Swing."

—MARTIN JOHNSON

SUN RA ARKESTRA

Living Sky

Omni Sound

With 2020's *Swirling*, the Sun Ra Arkestra—forever dedicated to the boundary-expanding Saturn-al jazz and future-life theories of the late Sun Ra—hung up a back-in-business sign for new music. While *Swirling* furthered Ra's patented brand of free funky jazz and skronky parade soul, the freshly recorded *Living Sky* gives off more of the sweet, classically imbued, slow R&B-ish vibe put forth by alto saxophonist/kora player Marshall Allen, the Arkestra's leader since Ra's earthly passing in 1993.

The mellow-grooving *Living Sky* goes backwards and forwards, slowly simmering to a boil like Ra's famous homemade soup for his Arkestra housemates. The 1955-vintage Ra-written track "Somebody Else's Idea," recorded in 1970 with ferocious vocalist June Tyson in front, gets renewed vigor

as a moody, noirish instrumental with crisp harmonies and shining brass courtesy of trumpeters Cecil Brooks and Michael Ray.

There are woozy takes on Chopin and Leigh Harline's "When You Wish Upon a Star," but Allen truly shines as *Living Sky*'s composer. The baleful ballad "Firefly" and the lavalike blues of "Marshall's Groove" steam and swing ahead, with memorable melody as their guide. Space is still

"Not an ordinary drummer-led session": Dafnis Prieto and Luciana Souza

EDITOR'S PICK

DAFNIS PRIETO

Cantar

Dafnison

For his ninth recording as leader, drummer Dafnis Prieto showcases songcraft in the company of his extraordinary vocal collaborator Luciana Souza. .

"Guajira en Sol" opens the door in Spanish with a bright, pointillistic landscape before giving way to a dark, heartbreakingly beautiful "When I Miss You." The cinematic songs contain images from the natural world: earth, sky, clouds, wind. Prieto reveals his heart in the poetic, lilting "Brisa" with a catchy countermelody on melodica. He even steps before the mic to sing with a tala-like intensity on "To the Concert," which has wild, dissonant moments. Both Prieto's and Souza's combustible vocals ignite flames, with pianist Martin Bejerano and saxophonist Peter Apfelbaum acting as accelerants. Bejerano begins to play with fists rather than fingers and Apfelbaum wails, honks, and double-times his variations.

Souza, meanwhile, sings the infectious samba "Houve um Tempo" in Portuguese; it is joyous, and for one fleeting moment all is right with the world. The vocalist is remarkable, especially on the gorgeous "Amanhecer Contigo" and the poetic, mysterious "The Muse." She also contributes lyrics to two compositions and translates a third into Portuguese. (Otherwise, all songs and lyrics are Prieto's.)

As with any Prieto project, there is astonishing drum work, most notably on "Unknown Man" and "Guajira en Lu." But this is not an ordinary drummer-led session. With its emphasis on composition, supported by the inspiring Souza and a creative cast of characters, *Cantar* shows Prieto as one of the most multidimensional artists working today.

—LARRY APPELBAUM

the place, but Allen's interpretation of that Ra motto now means pursuing more sonic elbow room for players such as Ray, French horn man Vincent Chancey, trombonist Adriene Davis, and tenor saxophonist Nasir Dickerson. Jumping in on the fun of free noisemaking, the Arkestra's leader picks up his kora and finds the spirits amid the clap of hand percussion and Gil Evans-ish muted brass tone on his "Day of the Living Sky."

With *Living Sky*, Allen has taken Ra's philosophy of liberation, made it more his own than ever, let fly and brought the Arkestra into yet another phase.

—A.D. AMOROSI

BEN SIDRAN

Swing State

Nardis

Piano trios of yore were all about music that was "highly arranged to be loosely played," as Michael Cuscuna aptly notes in the liner notes for *Swing State*, pointing to the approach veteran jazz-world force Ben Sidran takes on this set of standards. It's his first all-instrumental release in a recording career as a leader dating

back to his 1970 debut album *Feel Your Groove*. Sidran—once omnipresent as a broadcaster, singer, songwriter, music journalist, and producer—indeed leaves the guard rails up while allowing for creativity in the spaces between.

Sidran, joined by longtime collaborators Billy Peterson on upright bass and son Leo Sidran on drums, offers a pleasantly varied mix of styles, starting with the ambling swing of "Lullaby of the Leaves." He brings out deep-blues shades on the opener and on his sole original, the rollicking title track, throwing in rolls and conversational, melodic single-note lines. And he turns in two takes of the ballad "Laura," each built on a pulsing bass figure and Latin-tinged drum-set rhythms.

"Stompin' at the Savoy" is enhanced with a stair-stepping piano run and other adornments, and "Tuxedo Junction" thrives on a blues groove, heavy on the backbeat, and a relaxed swing section. "Ain't Misbehavin'" almost gets rowdy, allowing Peterson his only solo of the session, and the leader goes it alone on a pretty version of "Over the Rainbow." Sidran's trio, solid and appealing, doesn't break any new ground here: They mostly play it straight up the middle. But he certainly does right by these vintage gems dating back to the '30s, demonstrating their continuing viability as springboards for engaging ensemble playing and joyful improvising.

—PHILIP BOOTH

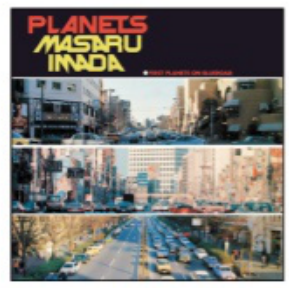
MASARU IMADA TRIO + 1

Planets

BBE

Pianist Masaru Imada is still alive at 90 and living, I presume, somewhere in the Tokyo he's called home for most of those 90 years. I'm wondering if he still works. I also wonder what he makes of this work from 1977, released originally on private press but brought, however belatedly, to the world at large this fall. Featuring drummer Tetsujiro Obara, bassist Kunimitsu Inaba, and—this deck's resident joker—percussionist Yuji Imamura, *Planets* starts out close to, if not home, at least safety, with some requisite modal charts and easy-feeling swing. Stick with the three plus one, though, and listen to them fly further out when they try.

Inaba's walking bass waxes weirder and then more like a hop-skip. The others fall away, leaving him to convey the idea of slow travel—through water or space, no matter—through rolling notes and double stops until he's playing the least he can possibly play and keep you convinced the speakers



aren't out. Obara steps to the fore, his rolls a little too soft for military might but ideal for this idea of steady-on. "A Marionette," not quite as herky-jerky as the title might suggest, uses sparse chords and sustain for a portrait of a puppet on its strings, moved to motion, and swaths of elegance.

"Sea's Pasture," which I'm betting took up most of the original Side 2, gives us jazz as impressionistic marine life—much less surging seas and shocking sharks than a contemplative look at an ecosystem, festooned in Imamura's filigree. The much-shorter alternate take appended at the end holds interest by contrast but consists mostly of condensed-sounding concepts already offered in full. Kudos to Imamura again, though, for skillful and resonant deployment of what sounds like a tabla.

—ANDREW HAMLIN

QASIM NAQVI/ WADADA LEO SMITH/ ANDREW CYRILLE

Two Centuries

Red Hook

The extraordinary late creative flowering of Wadada Leo Smith carries on. He turned 80 on December 18, 2021, but the outpouring of

EBRU YILDIZ

new albums, including multidisc sets, continues unabated. So do the diverse collaborations, tours, world premieres, lectures, residencies, workshops, and prizes.

Two Centuries is the debut recording of a trio with Qasim Naqvi on modular and Minimoog synthesizers and Andrew Cyrille on drums. The proliferation of electronic instruments has been a transformative development in jazz of the 21st century. Electronics can be a trap for the jazz musician, but Naqvi uses them here with taste and discretion, to serve the music. He composed all 11 tunes. His role is to provide the ever-evolving near-stillness, the wide canvases, upon which Smith paints. The third voice is Cyrille, two years older than Smith, also a distinguished elder statesman of the avant-garde. His drums might flare up anywhere in these open landscapes. Cyrille's function is to introduce factors like chance and volatility into this mostly meditative music.

Naqvi's bare, pure, mesmerizing melodies are starting points from which Smith, in a riveting trumpet tone, roams free. Naqvi wrote much of this music during the first waves of the pandemic. The shifting undercurrents generated by his synthesizers, and the deep plaintiveness of Smith's cries, evoke the uncertainty and darkness of that unprecedented human period,

which was also a time of social upheaval. It is moving to learn that the opening track, "For D.F.," is for Darnella Frazier, the young woman who recorded the video of George Floyd's murder. Smith's crescendos are shattering. On other pieces, like "Spiritual Is 150" and "Wraith," Smith deals in more nuanced messages. Each of his long calls is a compelling summons, spoken in the secret language of the soul.

—THOMAS CONRAD

XIOMARA TORRES

La Voz del Mar

Patois

The song is "Como Una Hoguera"—"like a bonfire"—and vocalist Xiomara Torres is in conflagration mode. Born in Colombia, she knows the salsa romantica groove of the original version and ups the ante. By turns playful and regal, she engages the horns, the marimba-fueled percussion, and the backing chorus of singers as the arrangement sends them her way.

It is one of many highlights on *La Voz del Mar* ("Voice of the Sea"),

a polyglot album of organic intimacy. Torres was raised in a family of iconic folk musicians; her father, Omar Torres, is on percussion on both "Como Una Hoguera" and the aching bolero "La Puerta."

Led by Torres, marimbaist Dan Neville, and composer/arranger David Obregon (all three of whom co-produced), *La Voz del Mar* is a compelling mixture of the hallowed traditions and variant strains that constitute Colombia's music. "Tarde Lo Conoci" is a lilting, accordion-powered *vellanato* popular on the country's Caribbean (northeastern) side. "Me Quedo Contigo" is a flamenco-tinged rumba that reflects the Spanish influence in the Pacific coastal region, but the vocals of Torres and the bass of Latin-jazz titan John Benitez add a more modern danceability. "Tio" is a Diego Obregon composition done in the traditional *curullao* style, with the "marimba de chonta" and call-and-response vocals. Trombonist Wayne Wallace guests on Obregon's harmonically rich *aguabajo* composition "Te Habla Mi Alma." The Beatles' "Let It Be" gets a salsa makeover and the closing rumba, "Filomena," features Torres' aunts along with legendary folkloric singer Nidia Gongora in the chorus.

This "voice of the sea" is at once familiar and refreshingly different. And there are more bonfires to come from Xiomara Torres.

—BRITT ROBSON

ANAT COHEN

Quartetinho

Anzic

Just by looking at her résumé, someone who doesn't know any better might assume that Anat Cohen is Brazilian. The Israeli-born, U.S.-based clarinetist and saxophonist has recorded and performed with the Choro Ensemble, drummer Duduka Da Fonseca, and percussionist Cyro Baptista, and she's shared top billing on a pair of albums with Trio Brasileiro and as many duo releases with seven-string guitarist Marcello Gonçalves. Adding to that running list, she's assembled this unique foursome—her "little quartet," as the title translates—with bandmates originally hailing from each of the aforementioned geographic points of connection.

Teaming up with pianist/accordionist Vitor Gonçalves, bassist/guitarist Tal Mashiach, and percussionist/synthesist James Shipp, and sticking to clarinet and bass clarinet, Cohen leads the way through a winning selection of nuanced numbers that look within and beyond Brazilian borders. For covers there's a playful, bass-bolstered take on Antônio Carlos Jobim's "O Boto"; a hip and quirky look at Maria do Carmo Barbosa de Melo's "Boa Tarde Povo"; the group's direct nod to Antonín Dvo□ák's folk-friendly *New World Symphony* with "Going Home"; and two contrasting Egberto Gismonti gems—the dawning "Palhaço" and animated "Frevo."

Six originals, drawing on broad influences, make up the balance of the program, with three of the four band members contributing to that tally. Shipp,

whose vibraphone is the keystone for much of this music, sets the album in motion with his wonderfully curious "Baroquen Spirit." Mashiach deals in two different strains of aching beauty with "The Old Guitar" and "Vivi & Zaco." And Cohen, bringing the sinuous "Birdie," spirit song "Canon," and swampy-and-bluesy "Louisiana" to the table, proves that her pen is every bit as impressive as her clarinet(s). This may be a compact quartet, but there's nothing small about its outlook and ambitions.

—DAN BILAWSKY

CLARK SOMMERS LENS

Intertwine

Outside In

Though bassist Clark Sommers leads the Chicago quintet behind this angular but appealing postbop outing—and it features an ace two-reed frontline of Geof Bradfield and Chris Madsen—none of these three gives *Intertwine* its essential color and character. That distinction goes to guitarist Matt Gold and

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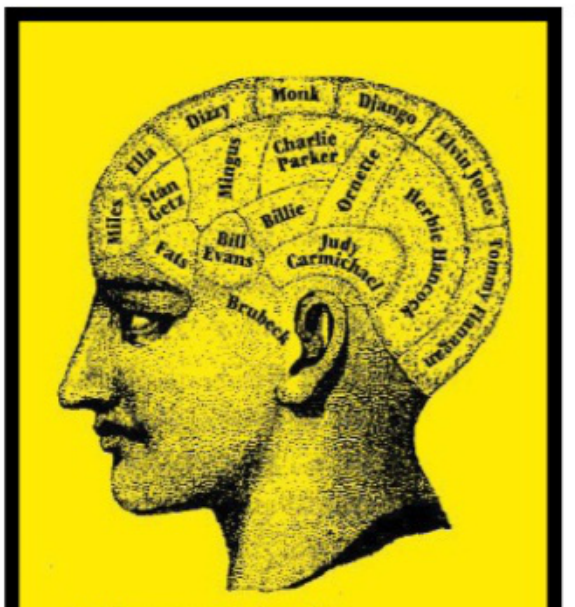

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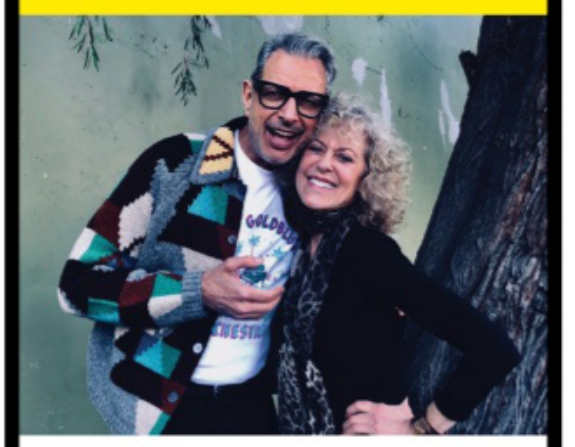
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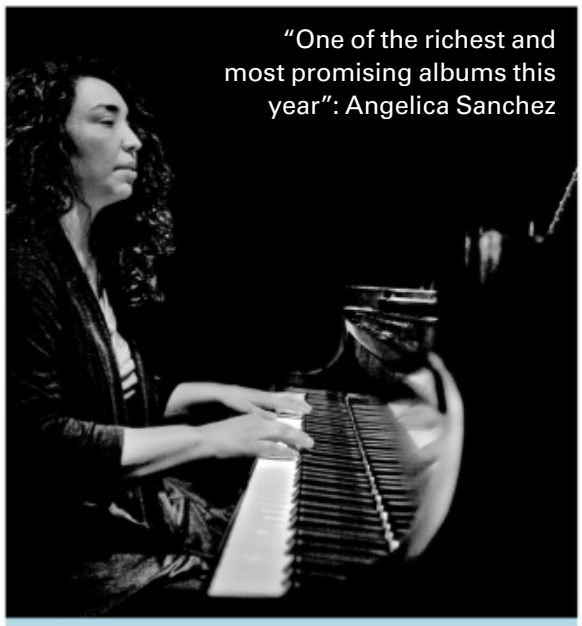


"One of the richest and most promising albums this year": Angelica Sanchez

EDITOR'S PICK

THE ANGELICA SANCHEZ TRIO/MICHAEL FORMANEK & BILLY HART

Sparkle Beings

Sunnyside

With Hart, Formanek, and Sanchez representing three generations of avant-garde playing, I'm tempted to call this date historical—especially since it got cut at the Van Gelder Studios in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, with Maureen Sickler engineering. Sanchez sat at the same piano many of her idols had pressed upon.

To render the bigger picture, though, the avant garde, to remain truly avant-garde, can acknowledge the past but must push through the present to the future. Here the seven-tune set succeeds in spades. Even if you've heard these tunes before—say, "Preludio a un Preludio," from Mario Ruiz Armengol—you haven't heard Formanek's meditative prelude before the other two come in, Sanchez laying down chords that fragment into short runs, Hart balancing dry brushes on his snare with gonglike raps on a cymbal.

Cecil Taylor's "With (Exit)" seems formless on top, but fecund with made meanings in its depths. The title track, one of three Sanchez originals, kicks off with Hart showing how he can turn toms and his metal bits into a ruminative language, then underscoring what Sanchez has to say with a scattered-shower theme, plus variations.

The big finish, furnished by a medley of Sanchez's "Before Sleep" with Duke Ellington's "The Sleeping Lady and the Giant That Watches Over Her," doesn't pull out all the stops—not that kind of set—but blooms, serenely, a sunflower's delight at the dawn. Formanek speculates, Hart pushes a pulse seemingly without a meter, Sanchez mixes and matches her short phrases in a more sprightly manner than elsewhere. One of the richest and most promising albums so far this year.

— ANDREW HAMLIN

drummer Dana Hall. The latter brings each tune its overall personality, the former its mood.

"Second Guess," the third track, is an instructive example. One of a dozen Sommers originals, it is not a blues but immediately broadcasts blues-isms with its stop-time intro. It's not just the rhythm itself, though: It's Hall's perfectly placed rolls and cymbal resonance that take it there. Gold's

savory comp under Madsen and Bradfield's dueling tenor solos creates just the right seasoning. Then he throws the real spice into his own solo.

Other tracks present similar situations. Gold and Hall are the dark mystery on "Ancient Voice"; the languor on "Weeks & Weeks"; the playful soul on "Nichols on the Quarter." They have their individual moments too: Gold's windswept wonder on "Also Tomorrow" is sublime, and Hall flexes his funk muscles on the title track. "Intertwine" also features fine bass work by Sommers, more intriguing even than his three features ("Harbor," "Skin and Bone," and "Bass Intro"). Guess why?

The reedmen aren't incidental here. Bradfield has a tremendous soprano feature on "Silent Observer," and it's a thrill to hear his deep, throaty tone alternate with Madsen's peppery one on "Second Guess" or interlock with it on "Invisible Arrow." (There's also great joy in the merger of Bradfield's bass clarinet with Madsen's tenor on "Nichols on the Quarter.") Still, there was some ineluctable magic on these two days in June 2021 when Gold met Hall. It's they who make the album such a fun listen.

—MICHAEL J. WEST

MARIA MENDES

Saudade, Colour of Love

Challenge

Saudade, Colour of Love isn't so much a follow-up to Netherlands-based vocalist Maria Mendes' 2019 album *Close to Me*, which won the Dutch equivalent of a jazz vocal Grammy Award. Rather, it's a captivating elaboration featuring much the same material and the same cast of characters.

Like *Close to Me*, her third album, *Saudade* is a sumptuous collaboration with pianist John Beasley conducting the Metropole Orkest, a mainstay of the Dutch music scene since the end of World War II. But whereas the earlier release was a studio project, the new album is a concert recording that offers Mendes and some orchestra members a little more leeway to stretch out on a fado-centric

program. Trained as an opera singer, the Portuguese-born Mendes veered off the conservatory path with her discovery of jazz, attaining real authority in the tradition after years of study. Working with Beasley, who produced and orchestrated the *Saudade* arrangements they wrote together (part of a most impressive run for Beasley, with *Saudade* arriving the same year as his spectacular work on Chucho Valdés' late-career masterwork *La Creación*), Mendes takes another step into a largely uncharted realm where jazz inflects the ritualistic laments of fado, a blues-like song form that evolved on Lisbon's hard-scrabble waterfront.

Kicking off with "Com Que Voz," a song that fado legend Amália Rodrigues recorded at the peak of her powers in 1969, *Saudade* features four of the same pieces as *Close to Me*, including "Foi Deus," which has a sparkling Beasley solo, and Hermeto Pascoal's episodic "Hermeto's Fado for Maria." They close the album on an upbeat note with "Meu Pobre Capitão," a piece they cowrote and set to a loping Brazilian groove that belies the desultory title.

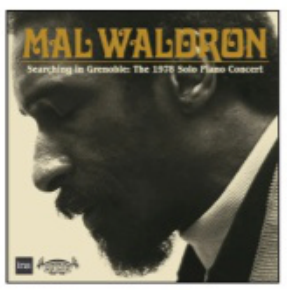
—ANDREW GILBERT

MAL WALDRON

Searching in Grenoble: The 1978 Solo Piano Concert

Tompkins Square

Finally, the great pianist Mal Waldron (1925-2002) is starting to get his due. Waldron had a career marked by two illustrious phases, and his style can be heard in several of today's leading pianists. In his early career, he was Billie Holiday's final accompanist, and his sideman credits included significant recordings with John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach. Following a nervous breakdown and lengthy rehabilitation during which he taught himself how to play again, Waldron's late 20th-century work is



highlighted by exceptional small groups and extraordinary duets with fellow Monk expert Steve Lacy. In this part of his career, he developed a dark, almost incantational style focused on repeated motifs, usually with his left hand.

Searching in Grenoble is an excellent primer on the pianist, finding him gradually developing his late career style. There are several hallmarks to that style; one is that his music is deliberate and unhurried, and that's showcased on the opening track, "Mistral Breeze/Sieg Haile," which gently unfolds and stuns over the course of 23 minutes. The track showcases Waldron's interest in repeating motifs until they become an obsession. Sometimes these figures become the basis for intense call and response, and other times he moves onto a new phrase to sculpt. Waldron is at his most elegant on "Soul Eyes," a track that Coltrane helped make into a jazz standard. His take on "Fire Waltz," a highlight of his time in Dolphy's band, is lean, almost ascetic. The standout of this set is "Snake Out," a piece that would become a staple of his work in the '80s and '90s, especially in duets with Lacy. Here his left-hand figures become ritualistic, offsetting a right that becomes equally repetitive. It makes for a unique, cathartic sound.

—MARTIN JOHNSON

ELVIN JONES

Revival: Live at Pookie's Pub

Blue Note

In the history of New York jazz clubs, Pookie's Pub barely lands on the radar. The Hudson Street space was miles away from the Village Vanguard or Birdland in terms of musical action (although geographically it sat across the street from the Half Note). Originally an Italian eatery, it only hosted jazz from the fall of 1966 to the end of the following year, charging no cover at the door.

From June to December 1967, Pookie's featured an extended residency for Elvin Jones, who was getting back on his feet after parting ways with John

Coltrane and spending a few harrowing months in Japan. One might be tempted to interpret this setting as a case of the mighty drummer falling hard. And you would be very wrong. This is Elvin Jones, after all.

The drummer led a quartet of rotating members at Pookie's. When an employee of the Ampex tape company documented a few nights in July 1967 at Jones' urging,

the band included tenor saxophonist Joe Farrell, bassist Wilbur Little, and pianist Billy Greene. Organist Larry Young sat in on piano for a reading of "Gingerbread Boy." Jones might have played to little or no audience—applause during the set is minimal—but he didn't let it affect his output. These recordings reveal the same thunder and drive that sealed his reputation with the Coltrane Quartet. In fact, his enthusiasm occasionally threatens to overpower his bandmates, but by and large there's a good balance of everyone.

Farrell, who would appear on Jones' first three albums on Blue Note, was already the perfect tenor player for the drummer by '67. He didn't attempt to copy Coltrane, but like his forebear he played with an endless stream of ideas that galvanized Jones, especially in a lengthy version of "Oleo." Greene, whose sole studio session would be the Jones/Richard Davis album *Heavy Sounds* recorded the same year, was a strong accompanist. His "M.E.," a vignette in the studio, became a 20-minute workout here. The bounce in Little's bass playing managed to cut through in the recording, no easy feat when playing with Jones.

This two-disc/three-record set offers an interesting cross section of new works and familiar standards-to-be. Farrell's flute on "My Funny Valentine" and "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise" plays it a bit safe, while his "13 Avenue 'B'" pushes everyone to a fevered pitch. "On the Trail," an excerpt from *The Grand Canyon Suite*, might seem like a questionable choice, but the band gets plenty of inspiration from it.

Jones's solos on tracks like his new "Keiko's Birthday March" might wander a bit, but he wasn't thinking about a recording at the time; he was playing "like there'd be no tomorrow," to borrow a quote from one of the accompanying essays in the detailed package. Besides, anytime he trades fours—or simply whacks his snare drum—the results simply feel joyous.

—MIKE SHANLEY

JOE McCARTHY'S NEW YORK AFRO-BOP ALLIANCE BIG BAND

Pan-American Nutcracker Suite

Angel Face

While most jazz aficionados consider Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's 1960 interpretation of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 1892 ballet *The Nutcracker* to be the final jazz word on the famous orchestral work, journeyman drummer Joe McCarthy upends that notion with his version of the endearing classic.

McCarthy's 18-piece big band includes trumpeter Brandon Lee, alto saxophonist Andrew Gould, bari saxophonist Frank Basile, trombonist Ryan Keberle, pianist Luis Perdomo, and bassist Boris Kozlov, performing brilliant arrangements (by the bandleader) that slap the senses silly in unexpected ways. This band plays as one, a rock-'em-sock-'em machine that exhorts ferocious Afro-Cuban rhythms as easily as it unleashes powerful solos.

From the bolero and mambo rhythms of "March" and the cha-cha-meets-6/8 blowout of "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" to the dreamlike "Arabian Dance," the unidentifiable hammered percussion sounds of "Chinese Dance," and the blazing partido alto and funk rhythms of "Dance of the Reed Flutes," McCarthy and company take what we think we knew and reinvent it anew, retaining the beauty of the original compositions while injecting them with enough force to drive a level-5 hurricane.

A veteran of the United States Naval Academy Band, McCarthy has appeared on several previous recordings, including *Caribbean Jazz Project/Afro-Bop Alliance Featuring Dave Samuels*, winner of the Latin Jazz Album Latin Grammy of 2008. That album was also nominated in the Latin Jazz category at the 2009 "regular" Grammy Awards. *Pan-American Nutcracker Suite* should repeat that feat if there's any jazz justice left in the world.

—KEN MICALLEF

VINCE GUARALDI TRIO

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Craft/Concord

For many jazz fans, it's the greatest holiday recording ever. For others, with its largely instrumental, non-caroling format, perhaps not. But the creative soundtrack work of pianist Vince Guaraldi's trio, combined with the popularity of the first animated TV special from the popular *Peanuts* comic strip, made 1965's *A Charlie Brown Christmas* the best-selling jazz title of all time. Still a holiday favorite, the soundtrack was recently reissued in formats including a deluxe expanded CD or double LP and a super deluxe five-disc boxed set or 80-track digital collection with 50 previously unheard outtakes.

The San Francisco-born Guaraldi's left hand alone was known for creating memorable phrases with vibraphonist Cal Tjader's band, and the pianist was already a Grammy winner on his own before TV producer Lee Mendelson hired him for this soundtrack. Recorded with bassist Fred Marshall and drummer Jerry Granelli, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* would deservedly earn Guaraldi wider recognition—only a decade before he would die from a heart attack at age 47. Classic original instrumentals feature the darting figures of "Linus and Lucy" and

cascading swing of "Skating," along with the child-choir-enhanced "My Little Drum" and "Christmas Time Is Here."

The initial 11-song soundtrack was fleshed out with traditional pieces like "O Tannenbaum" and classical material like Beethoven's "Für Elise," so the 80-track digital reissue includes mostly different mixes and takes of all the above, each with supple accompaniment by Marshall and Granelli. The 2022 remixes are front-loaded, and perhaps only audiophiles will notice differences from the original mixes, which come later in the program. Further in, there are trio starts and stops and audible commentary on the alternate takes—17 of "Christmas Is Coming" alone. Overkill to some, maybe, but for Guaraldi fans, hearing his different improvisational ideas take shape qualifies as a holiday year-round.

—BILL MEREDITH

JEFF DENSON/ROMAIN PILON/BRIAN BLADE

Finding Light

Ridgeway

With 2019's B*etween Two Worlds*, bassist Jeff Denson introduced a remarkable trio featuring guitarist Romain Pilon and drummer Brian Blade. Live dates followed and the three later embarked on a fruitful tour in early

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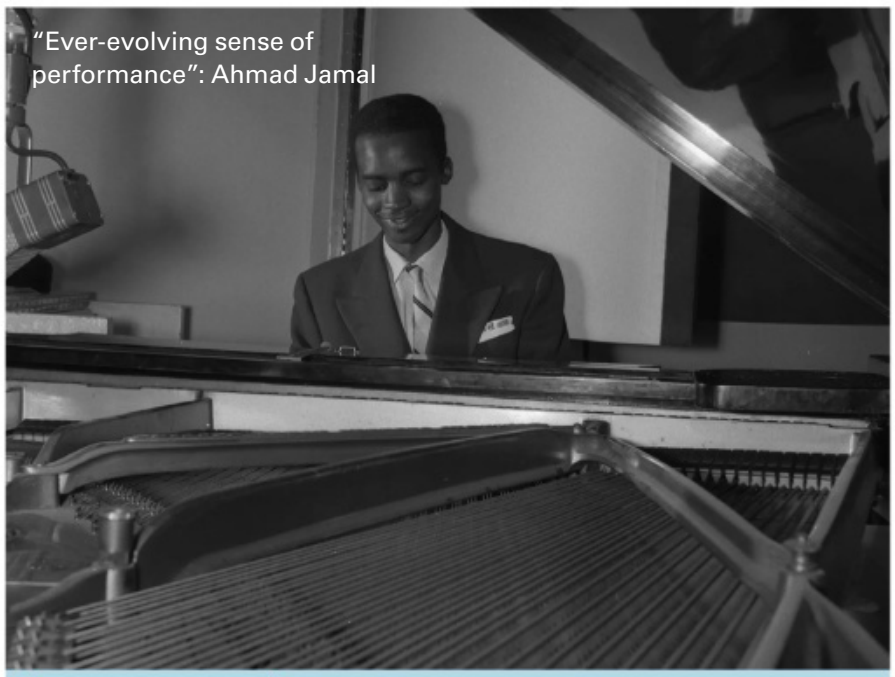
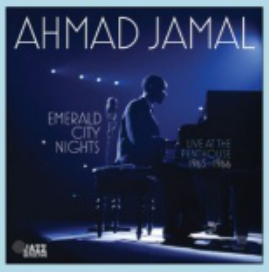

"Ever-evolving sense of performance": Ahmad Jamal

EDITOR'S PICK

AHMAD JAMAL

Emerald City Nights: Live at the Penthouse (1963-1964)/ (1965-1966)

Jazz Detective



If you ever needed a comprehensive introduction to the appeal of Ahmad Jamal's straight bop work, the two volumes of *Emerald City Nights* may just do the trick. The dual two-disc sets (out on both CD and vinyl LP) come from tapes—found by jazz tape detective Zev Feldman—that capture the piano maestro across four years of performances at Seattle's Penthouse club with four different bands. The variation across the two albums shows Jamal's ever-evolving sense of performance and band direction across those years.

(1963-1964) sees Jamal and his trios in animated, pull-out-all-the-stops form. On "Minor Adjustments" you can almost hear the force that bassist Richard Evans puts into each note as the band swings hard but keeps the pace at mid-tempo, letting the music's attack hit the ears. Later, on "Squatty Roo," the band is flying so hard they seem to want to launch themselves out of the club. Evans cheekily quotes "Yankee Doodle" as Jamal judiciously picks out phrases. Then the pianist rises with the band's dynamic, punching out towering chords as drummer Chuck Lampkin hammers out licks on his kit. It may seem like a crescendo, but the trio carries the energy forward like a steam train at top speed.

On the other hand, *(1965-1966)* emphasizes more of the recognizable standards that helped establish Jamal's credentials. The album opens with a lovely take on "I Didn't Know What Time It Was": Jamal begins with a reharmonized intro, then the band strolls through the melody like it was a balmy Sunday. The pace quickens to a sprint a few minutes in, but the piano never rises above a conversational tone, balancing—with bassist Jamil Nasser and Lampkin—a mood that's energetic but relaxed. This is matched by Jamal, Nasser and Vernel Fournier on "Like Someone in Love"; the contrast between Jamal's quietude on the keys and the band's bristling cadence creates an enthralling bed of sound to sink into.

There's a beautiful performance of "Poinciana" on *(1965-1966)*—there had to be lest the Jamal devotees riot—but one of the greatest gems here is a version of "Feelin' Good" from March 25, 1965. Nina Simone's definitive rendition, with swaggering horns and cinematic strings, wouldn't be released for another three months. Jamal's take, almost unrecognizable at first, leads in with a slow-midtempo march beat by Nasser and Lampkin. But Jamal plays around, repeating the melody attached to the phrase "And this old world is a new world / And a bold world" as a kind of mantra. After building to a mighty peak, the band does a natural fadeout, leaving you wanting more. Luckily, there are 18 other tracks to satisfy the craving.

— JACKSON SINNENBERG

2020, delighting West Coast and Midwest audiences before capping the whole experience by filming a performance in Berkeley, California. Two years later, after being forced to reschedule their reunion on several occasions, they gathered again at Oakland's 25th Street Recording—the same space where they birthed their collective debut—and captured this sophomore set.

Having traversed the darkness of the pandemic as

individuals, these men reconnected as a band eager to find the light. So it should come as no great shock that hopefulness serves as a throughline for this album. Whether taking a Crescent City cruise in five on "Daily Jubilee of Dancing Herbie D.," using urgency as a bonding agent for the title track, delivering zestful swing through "The Tipster," or giving thanks for comforting prospects and breaks in the clouds with "Espoir," the trio proves resolute in its embrace of optimism. Even when weighty topics surface—the uncertainty of the spring of 2020 embedded in "A Moment in Time," the fragility of our planet painted in somewhat baleful fashion for "Terre"—a notable spirit of togetherness redirects the mind and ears toward more positive places.

Mirroring the programming choices for *Between Two Worlds*, the focus here is solely on originals from Denson and Pilon, respectively: The bassist contributes five (plus his improvised "Terre Intro") and the guitarist gifts four. All are superb. In addition to the aforementioned numbers, there's the funky "This Way Cooky," pleasantly paced "Wishing Well," and skittering and shimmering "Sixto." With sounds both brilliant and beaming, the music truly reflects the nature of its creators.

—DAN BILAWSKY

MOOR MOTHER

Jazz Codes

Anti-

Remember those images of stellar nurseries from the James Webb telescope that enchanted the internet last July? They're what Moor Mother's new album, *Jazz Codes*, sounds like. For multihyphenate artist Camae Ayewa's second album for the Anti- label, she conjures a phantasmagorical index of references from jazz's past, present, and future.

Like the chorus of liminal voices in George Saunders' novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, *Jazz Codes*' words, stories, and figures swirl around the soundfield like fish in a murky tank, drifting into clarity, then obscured again just as

quickly. It's an entire genre in antimatter, from a semblance of ice melting in a glass ("Umsanzi") to a long-gone trumpet hero ("Woody Shaw"). "Let us/ Breathe in Mother Mary Lou/ Father Ra/ Sister Billie/ Brother Shaw/ A Family of Blues too long to list," read Moor Mother's liner notes. "A Jazz funeral turned revival/ Twistaway from America's strange fruits/ Into scats of Jazz code."

Crucially, *Jazz Codes* doesn't simply survey the dust of the 20th century; it points to the ongoing potential of the form. This is reflected in Ayewa's expertly curated list of cutting-edge guests—like saxophonist Keir Neuringer ("Joe McPhee Nation Time Intro"), R&B multi-instrumentalist Orion Sun and pianist Jason Moran ("Ode to Mary"), and flutist Nicole Mitchell ("Arms Save").

Still, there are so many other places to hear all these players; with time, might *Jazz Codes* get lost in the sauce? Based on the quality of the music and expedient running time, it shouldn't. At 18 tracks in 43 minutes with no serious missteps, this album rewards repeated listening.

—MORGAN ENOS

THE HEADHUNTERS

Speakers in the House

Ropeadope

Herbie Hancock assembled the Headhunters in 1973, putting the fun in funk-jazz for a platinum-selling debut album that joined the piano giant with percussionist Bill Summers and others for classic tracks "Chameleon" and "Watermelon Man." Nearly a half-century later, long after Hancock left and more than a decade since the band's last recording, the concept lives on. Summers, saxophonist and fellow New Orleanian Donald Harrison, and longtime Headhunters drummer Mike Clark again have tweaked the sound.

Platinum, their 2011 release, had the Headhunters inject hip-hop into the mix with contributions from the likes of George Clinton, Snoop Dogg, and Killah Priest. For *Speakers in the House*, the Crescent City sound plays a stronger role on tunes including "Rockin at the Mole House," its second-line rhythms

© DON BRONSTEIN

cued by drum kit and congas and topped by Harrison's bluesy alto figures and a burrowing bass synth line.

Opener "Kongo Square" of course nods to New Orleans but gets its kicks from Fode Sissoko's gorgeous unaccompanied kora playing and wordless vocals. It also

gains from simmering percussion and lots of fruitful back-and-forth between Harrison and trumpeter Ashlin Parker, leader of the New Orleans-based Trumpet Mafia.

The relatively brief album, clocking in at about 45 minutes, offers a mostly infectious tour of various shades of funk and jazz. "HH 75," with Reggie Washington's bright-sounding bass guitar leading, is a bit reminiscent of fusion in the mold of Stanley Clarke (and '70s Headhunters). "Over the Bar," with its barking clavinets, twisty chord changes, and zippy horn lines, feels like a Stevie Wonder-ish instrumental before sliding into a more open, jazz-fueled section featuring pianist Stephen Gordon and Washington. There are other highlights here too, including the sticky James Brown-style groove on "Vaspurakan" and the Afro-Cuban breakdown and Harrison and Gordon's brash solos on "Stop Watch."

—PHILIP BOOTH

TREVOR DUNN'S TRIO-CONVULSANT AVEC FOLIE À QUATRE

Séances

Pyroclastic

Trevor Dunn is the consummate model of jazz-metal mashups. The prolific bassist and composer has meted out the heaviest of bottom-end riffage as a member of the Melvins and Mr. Bungle and currently logs time in Titan to Tachyons and Dan Weiss Stareba-

by, among tons of other projects. After nearly two decades, Dunn has revived his own metal-centric powerhouse, Trio-Convulsant. 2004 saw its last full-length, *Sister Phantom Owl Fish*, an odd-time- and power-chord-laden gut punch with guitarist Mary Halvorson spraying a fusillade of bone-crushing licks as drummer Ches Smith painted a dizzily complex core.

Eighteen long years later, Dunn, Halvorson, and Smith's sharp-edged cohesiveness remains full-throttle on *Séances* but with a decidedly chamber-like bent. That's due to this expanded iteration of Dunn's Trio-Convulsant, supplemented by Folie à Quatre, comprising Anna Webber (flute), Carla Kihlstedt (viola, violin), Mariel Roberts (cello), and Oscar Noriega (clarinet, bass clarinet).

Swapping out *Sister Phantom Owl Fish*'s minimalist metallic guitar crunch for a more strings-and-winds-based swirl, Dunn and his nimble band weave a knotty note-packed web in which the myriad pieces improbably fit. "Secours Meurtriers," the sprawling opener, cements the set's zigzagging and rapid-fire momentum in a relentless, resounding fashion. While these pieces have hectic, proggy underpinnings, Dunn's bandleader skillset keeps the chaos under control. Deep cuts like "Saint-Médard" and "1733" sound like a mathy Melvins backed by a string section.

Partly inspired by the Convulsionnaires of Saint-Médard, an 18th-century French Christian sect who engaged in debaucherous worship, Dunn's *Séances* has ostensibly provided their soundtrack with this eccentric and thrilling effort.

—BRAD COHAN

SONICA

Sonica

Outside In

Powered by engrossing female harmonies and the dynamism of the female spirit, Sonica creates anthems for peace, love, and change. Largely an extension of vocalist, producer, and composer Thana Alexa's ONA project, Sonica combines Alexa's skills and vision with those of charismatic vocalist Nicole Zuratis and bassist Julia Adamy. Over the album's brief 30 minutes, the trio combines jazz eclecticism with elements of pop, folk, and soul music, creating a kind of 21st-century hybrid Staple Singers built on intricate harmonies, hopeful messages, and mind-blowing drumming courtesy of Antonio Sánchez, Dan Pugach, and Ross Pederson.

Recorded and produced at Alexa's home studio in New York, *Sonica* commences with "Doyenne," which includes a spoken-word excerpt from women's-rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech "Ain't I a Woman," bookended with snippets of Gloria Steinem and Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai.

Consciously fashionable, the trio follows contemporary production throughout, as on a cover of Bon Iver's "Michicant," Zuraitis' plaintive arrangement

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and performance a melancholic muse. A Zuratis original, "Come a Long Way," continues the somber tone, but with a wonderful sense of ebb and flow pushing and

prodding the song's central theme of mental-health advocacy.

A thoughtful, harmony-infused reading of Stevie Wonder's "Love's in Need of Love Today" precedes the album's centerpiece, "Change It," which crushes climate-change deniers with such pointed lyrics as "Watch the seas rise because we won't compromise" and "Science isn't a game/we must listen and admit we are to blame" over a heaving, body-jolting arrangement.

The album closes with a sentimental Irish favorite, "Danny Boy." Notwithstanding that odd misstep in an album of bold activism, Sonica makes protest music hipsters, millennials, and even cave dwellers can embrace.

—KEN MICALLEF

JUDY NIEMACK

What's Love?

Sunnyside

What's love got to do with it? When it comes to veteran jazz vocalist Judy Niemack, everything. Almost 45 years after she released her first album, Niemack has lost none of her curiosity about the vicissitudes of the human heart. It seems fitting that the veteran educator who's spread the gospel of jazz around the world offers a master class in designing a program.

It's not so much the sequence of the tunes, which are mostly Niemack originals written with various collaborators. Rather, in describing and evoking the stages of romantic entanglement, the songs knock together and amplify larger themes about how we connect with each other. Produced by the estimable Don Sickler, this is an album by a master who knows just what she wants to say and how she wants to say it. The fact that Niemack is working with a superlative cast—featuring pianist Sullivan Fortner, bassist Doug Weiss, drummer

Joe Farnsworth, and guitarist Peter Bernstein—makes *What's Love?* a question (and a recording) well worth lingering over.

Not every song hits home. While the melody is lovely, "Catalyst" is too on-the-nose in its description of infatuation for my taste. But Niemack doesn't linger in bliss. She follows with a more-in-sadness-than-anger ballad "I'm Moving On" (which features some particularly striking work by Fortner) and offers a languorous reimagining of the Tina Turner hit "What's Love Got to Do with It." The album's two standards are also gems, as she imbues "For All We Know" with tender uncertainty and avoids self-pity as she mines the deep vein of regret running through "Born to Be Blue." *What's Love?* situates Niemack in her element, mixing it up with the cats, revealing insights she's gleaned on her travels.

— ANDREW GILBERT

PAULINE OLIVEROS & JAMES ILGENFRITZ WITH ANAGRAM ENSEMBLE

Altamirage

Infrequent Seams

Two freethinking sound explorers join forces on this otherworldly collection of pieces. Radical composer/accordionist Pauline Oliveros was an electronic music icon whose revolutionary practices employed magnetic tape and the newly developed synthesizer. James Ilgenfritz is a modern-day improvisatory titan, a bassist and composer with a deeply expressionistic voice on his instrument. It's no wonder they were collaborators and friends.

Altamirage yields the fruits of their partnership, which lasted from 2007 until Oliveros' passing in 2016. A compilation that gathers various improvised duo performances and early compositions of Oliveros' performed by Ilgenfritz and Anagram Ensemble, it manifests a vibe of effortless fluidity. As weightless as the compositions are, they also carry an unsettling tension and a level of unpredict-

ability. These works, as multidisciplinary sound artist Maria Chavez writes in the album liner notes, form "a rare glimpse" into Oliveros' early development of her intrepid vision.

"Outline: for flute, percussion and string bass," featuring Ilgenfritz, flutist Martha Cargo, and percussionist Chris Nappi, is a 14-minute tour de force of playful and idiosyncratic clang and clatter that has enough twists and turns to make one's head spin with delight. Meanwhile, the five "Trio for Trumpet, Accordion and String Bass" vignettes performed by Ilgenfritz, trumpeter Stephanie Richards, and accordionist Nathan Koci serve as abstract jigsaw puzzles waiting to be solved. Oliveros appears on four of the album's 10 meditations in duet with Ilgenfritz, the pair articulating a sonic language all their own on MIDI accordion and contrabass.

Oliveros coined the phrase "Deep Listening," which she defined as "a practice that is intended to heighten and expand consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and attentional dynamics as humanly possible." *Altamirage* is deep listening indeed.

—BRAD COHAN

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Here It Is: A Tribute to Leonard Cohen

Blue Note

ART OF TIME ENSEMBLE

Songs of Leonard Cohen Live

Art of Time

Paying tribute to Leonard Cohen can be a daunting prospect. His vocals, as borderline-atonal and emotionally enervated as they may have sounded, were in fact carefully crafted to reveal the pathos, tragedy, and ironic humor of his lyrics. "You are playing to people who have experienced a catastrophe," he instructed in his 1979 prose poem "How to Speak Poetry." "This should make you very quiet. Speak the words, convey the data, step aside."

The backing musicians—guitarist Bill Frisell, saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins, keyboardist Kevin Hayes, bassist Scott Colley, and drummer Nate Smith among them—for *Here It Is*, a pop-star-studded Cohen tribute, provide richly textured soundscapes that both enhance the material and give it fresh timbral and emotional flavorings. In fact, Frisell's showcase, "Bird on a Wire," and Wilkins' "Avalanche" give a tantalizing hint of what an all-instrumental Cohen tribute might achieve.

The vocalists are a more mixed bag. Some, such as Nathaniel Rateliff ("Famous Blue Raincoat"), Gregory Porter ("Suzanne"), and Luciana Souza ("Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye"), seem to struggle to summon the blend of artistic focus and psychic surrender necessary to inhabit, rather than proclaim, the

emotionally fraught landscapes invoked by Cohen's lyrics.

Norah Jones' raspy half-whisper on "Steer Your Way," on the other hand, approximates Cohen's own trademark intimations of broken-soul'd grace; James Taylor's "Coming Back to You" sounds surprisingly unaffected and non-bathetic; and both Peter Gabriel ("Here It Is") and Iggy Pop ("You Want It Darker") descend into sepulchral growls worthy of the master himself. Mavis Staples, her voice less supple but no less emotionally riveting than during her prime, throws her entire soul into "If It Be Your Will": She remains beyond criticism, one of the living lights of our time, and as usual she and her material rise up together to do one another full justice.

In February 2018, Toronto's Art of Time Ensemble, along with selected vocalists and readers, presented a three-night event fêting Cohen (who was still alive and working then). S*ongs of Leonard Cohen Live* features 13 of the songs performed

over the course of those three nights. The music—alternately lush, lilting, and grandiose—is never less than evocative, but in most cases sets different tones from those of Cohen's own backings, whose sparseness was often the driving force behind their emotional power. The singers, meanwhile, mostly drawn from the Canadian pop scene, were faced with the task of hewing to their musical training and background while doing justice to the bleak apocalypse-of-the-everyday landscape limned in Cohen's songs.

Sarah Harmer brings pristine perfectionism to "Dance Me to the End of Love" and "Come Healing." Steven Page modulates between delicacy and neo-operatic grandiosity on "A Singer Must Die." Sarah Slean's take on Cohen's suicidal-ideation anthem "Dress Rehearsal Rag" summons genuine desperation, but the original's bitterness is absent; her protagonist is self-pitying, not self-lacerating.

On the other hand, Tom Wilson's guttural moan on "Closing

Time" sounds more like late-period Cohen than Cohen himself, although it might have been more effective if he'd made it sound more like a party than a dirge. He also delivers "Who by Fire"—a roll call of the deceased—with a chilling directness accentuated by sparse acoustic guitar accompaniment. Gregory Hoskins and Steven Page's "Hallelujah" mercifully eschews the bathos that mars too many covers of this Cohen classic; Page wittily portrays the "whipped" would-be Lothario begging for erotic satisfaction in "I'm Your Man." If, as Cohen sang in "Anthem," "There is a crack in everything/ That's how the light gets in," interpreters like Hoskins, Page, and Wilson come closest to acknowledging and celebrating the irony-honed optimism behind that aphorism.

—DAVID WHITEIS

VIDEO

SACHA JENKINS

Louis Armstrong's Black & Blues

Apple/Imagine

In 1989, jazz writer-turned-director Gary Giddins crafted *Satchmo: The Life of Louis Armstrong*, with Melvin Van Peebles as the craggy musical voice of America's first great jazz man and interviewees such as Wynton Marsalis discussing the travails of the trumpeter's life. In 2022, hip-hop writer-turned-documentarian Sacha Jenkins crafted *Louis Armstrong's Black & Blues*, with Nas as the craggy musical voice of America's first great jazz man and interviewees such as Wynton Marsalis discussing the travails of the trumpeter's life. Both films weave together Super-8 home movies, newsreel footage, and Hollywood film clips to create an angered-and-awed mosaic of viewpoints on Armstrong from collaborators both Black and White.

The difference between the two documentaries, beyond the new film's hi-def graphics and poignant, pointed finds such as vintage interviews with Armstrong's fiercest critics like Ossie Davis (listening to the actor/author/activist feeling shock at the sight of an Armstrong forlorn and frustrated at being mistreated by fellow Black artists will bring tears to your eyes), is that *Black & Blues* cuts deeper and draws blood. Giddins' vision is great, but Jenkins fuels a more visceral, even incendiary experience.

That fire comes from the director's judicious use of Armstrong's own smartly lyrical letters (seeing the way he stylizes the word "marijuana" is priceless), touring diaries, and

homemade voice recordings—a voice that isn't the scatting, happy rasp of popular early tracks such as "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You" or the sing-song-y latter-day likes of "Now You Has Jazz" from MGM's *High Society*. Armstrong was pissed off: at White American managers for taking his money, at White American bookers and hoteliers who'd happily hire his bands to sell out their shows but wouldn't allow him to stay or eat in their establishments. (Hearing him call one Hollywood lackey a "peckerwood" is by itself worth the price of admission.)

Armstrong was even more disgusted that many Black Americans by the time of the civil-rights movement had mistaken his toothy smile and wide-eyed stare—something Marsalis admits to hating with a passion as a young man—as collaboration in his own "Uncle Tom-ing." This couldn't have been farther from the truth; the film makes clear that the public image was nothing more than a visage to mask sadness, and archival news footage shows the trumpeter harshly criticizing the Eisenhower administration for looking the other way as Black students got harassed while attempting to integrate Southern schools. Lots of f-bombs get dropped by good ol' Satchmo in *Black & Blues*.

Mostly, though, there is joy to be found in Jenkins' doc and its lively subject. For every slight to Armstrong's person, there's the glow of happiness and pride he felt in bringing forth a new kind of music before most could even imagine it, at forging racial harmony with White musicians such as Jack Teagarden, and for making a life based on community, social service, and spirit even when put upon himself.

And trust me, when you're done with *Black & Blues*, you'll be hitting Spotify and Amazon for every Louis Armstrong song you can find—the man and his music are that contagious.

—A.D. AMOROSI

BOOKS

JASON MILES

The Extraordinary Journey of Jason Miles: A Musical Biography

Book Writing Cube

Brooklyn-born keyboardist/producer Jason Miles has charted an impressive recording career that includes credits with Miles Davis, Luther Vandross, and David Sanborn. And it's all documented in his autobiography, *The Extraordinary Journey of Jason Miles*.

His interactions with these artists and others—an early chapter recounts crossing paths with Michael Brecker at a New York sushi restaurant and helping him buy a synthesizer in

1984—are highlights throughout. Yet there are also clues, like that chapter's quote of "I always thought that I was ahead of everybody else," that bring the point of Miles' self-published memoir into focus: that he's deserving of wider recognition.

Is he right? Perhaps. His membership in Queens-based funk band the Jamaica Boys connected him with bassist/producer Marcus Miller, who then brought Miles on board for Davis' 1986 album *Tutu*. The keyboardist's participation was, of course, subject to the trumpeter's approval, which was no small feat given the latter's often acerbic personality. Yet the author recounts winning him over with his synthesizer programming and sampling—also featured on Davis' 1989 follow-up *Amandla*—in vivid detail.

Had Davis (who died in 1991) lived longer and used Miles' work on more albums, the keyboardist's life story might have been different. Instead, later chapters recount Miller drawing him into other projects based in pop and R&B (Vandross) and contemporary jazz (Sanborn).

The keyboardist's writing style is free-flowing to the point of stream-of-consciousness, including grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. He recalls recording jingles ("It was a lucrative scene to be in, but it had nothing to do with making records"), documents his solo recording career from the 1990s onward, and describes himself as the "low man on the totem pole of the upper echelon" for his studio work—a notch below producer status—within his star associations.

Miles' subsequent career as a producer is documented late, as is his comparatively rare stage work via the Global Noize project of 2008, a collaboration between Miles and DJ Logic. The group's self-titled album and 25-show club tour of the United States eventually becomes a saga, yet collectively includes Bernie Worrell, Meshell Ndegeocello, Jeff Coffin, and Mike Clark. His 2015 *Kind of New* pairing with trumpeter Ingrid Jensen results in turmoil followed by reinvention to end the book, but like much of *The Extraordinary Journey of Jason Miles*, the most extraordinary moments are steeped in the company he keeps.

,—BILL MEREDITH

JOE LA BARBERA AND CHARLES LEVIN

Times Remembered: The Final Years of the Bill Evans Trio

University of North Texas

"I'm sorry, but your friend didn't make it."

And with that, a small group of friends, loved ones, and co-workers knew the death of William John Evans, age 51, September 15, 1980, at New York City's Mount Sinai Hospital. Evans had coughed blood and struggled to stay conscious as Joe La Barbera, Evans' last drummer, steered to the emergency room. Everyone had hoped, and prayed, for good news that didn't come.

Was that expected? Point of view. Yes, because despite Evans' insistence that his private life remain that, those close knew what was wrong, and his addictions loomed all the more powerfully for staying shoved into the wings. No, because, as La Barbera articulates in his slim, heartfelt memoir of 20 months with Evans, the leader of the band put a bubble around himself onstage. The bubble said: I am in control. Then an hour or so later the man walked offstage, and

the bubble burst.

The book hardly follows a conventional pattern, but Evans was not a conventional subject. La Barbera goes through his own musical family background; his bad grades at Berklee; his mastering of late-night bandstand etiquette, and of respectable work habits; the résumé-building (Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Toots Thielemans); the audition for Evans; then the lock.

Twenty months. Enough time for the ecstasy of telepathy with two other men, wonder beyond words. And enough time for the encroaching sadness.

—ANDREW HAMLIN

School of Many Streams

Top-notch tracks from alumni of the New England Conservatory's 50-year-old Contemporary Musical Arts program

BY HANKUS NETSKY AND EDEN MACADAM-SOMER

Hankus Netsky (L) and Eden MacAdam-Somer

We've had so many extraordinary musicians study in NEC's Contemporary Musical Arts department since it was founded in 1972 (under the name "Third Stream"), delving deep into ear training, learning to cross boundaries, pushing limits, and finding their own musical voices. As we celebrate 50 years of the program, it seems fitting to look back and take stock of those voices. Here are a few of our favorite recordings by alumni.

Hankus' Choices:

Don Byron

"Charley's Prelude"

Bug Music (Nonesuch, 1996)

One of the most prolific and creative figures in modern music, Don Byron continues to surprise aficionados with his ventures into deep stylistic waters of every type, including klezmer, art song, opera, swing, and most recently, extraordinary scores for PBS documentaries. My favorite of them all continues to be *Bug Music*, his 1996 tribute to Raymond Scott, Duke Ellington, and John Kirby. With a pen that captures every nuance of each arranger's intention, Byron always lets the music speak for itself with ageless eloquence.

John Medeski

"Luz Marina"

A Different Time (OKeh, 2013)

Ever since he began recording and touring with two former NEC compatriots, Billy Martin and Chris Wood, in 1991, pianist John Medeski has been a major force in groove-based improvisation. But on his 2013 solo release *A Different Time*, fans got to experience him in a pensive mood. Here he pays tribute to a different set of influences, including Ran Blake, his principal musical mentor back in his student days, and—on "Luz Marina," my favorite track on this superb CD—the dreamlike world of early French impressionist composers like Maurice Ravel and Erik Satie.

The Jamie Baum Septet+

"The Meeting (Tana Dery Na)"

In This Life (Sunnyside, 2013)

A virtuosic flutist and arranger with a true gift for lyricism, great imagination, and a wide range of musical sounds and genres at her fingertips, Jamie Baum joyfully weaves together improvisational and ensemble settings that mix contemporary jazz harmonies and textures with deeply felt influences from distant corners of the world.

Eden's Choices:

Dominique Eade & Ran Blake

"West Virginia Mine Disaster"

Town and Country (Sunnyside, 2017)

In a world full of powerful voices, Dominique Eade stands head and shoulders above the rest. No matter how many times I hear her perform, she never seems to reach an end to what she can do. Eade came to NEC as a student in 1978, shortly after the Third Stream department was founded by Gunther Schuller, with Ran Blake as chair. Blake and Eade have recorded numerous albums together, often drawing on the Great American Songbook. With this project, recorded in the wake of the 2016 election, they chose to focus on folk songs about poverty, the prison system, and other issues of disparity and injustice. This song, originally written and sung by Jean Ritchie, takes on new weight and poignancy in two different iterations here.

Nima Janmohammadi

"Avaze Isfahan"

The Kiss Belongs to Nobody (2017)

This album reflects composer/multi-instrumentalist Nima Janmohammadi's lifetime immersion in Persian classical music, an aural tradition emphasizing improvising and playing from memory. After intensive preparation, engaging with formal, melodic, and rhythmic "points of departure," each track on this album was recorded from beginning to end without editing. Perhaps one can best speak about this music in the artist's own words: "I am interested in that infinite moment, that experience of timelessness, when the border of playing between consciousness and unconsciousness is blurred, as well as the border between improvisation and composition."

Umbrella Pine

"XII: Hanged Man"

Seven (2020)

Since graduating from NEC in 2020, Magdalena Abrego (guitar/electronics/voice) and Allison Burik (alto sax/bass clarinet/voice) have continued to rise as internationally recognized figures in the jazz and experimental scenes. The album *Seven* by their duo Umbrella Pine features compositions by both artists, taking the listener on an intense musical journey, pushing boundaries of sound, time, composition, and improvisation. JT

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, and scholar **Hankus Netsky** *and violinist, vocalist, and percussive dancer* **Eden MacAdam-Somer** *are co-chairs of the NEC's CMA department. For more of their picks, visit jazztimes.com.*

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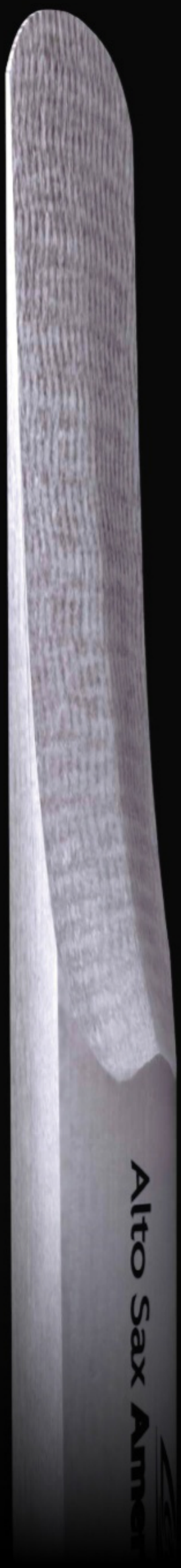

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